Variety & access

An evaluation of the V&A's access programme
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Terminology

Throughout this report, the terminology used follows the preferences of the communities discussed:

- Visually-impaired includes partially sighted and blind people.
- The word "deaf" indicates people who use BSL (British Sign Language) or SSE (Sign Supported English) as a principal means of communication, but may also use lip-reading, sound enhancement or other support.
- "Deaf" (when used with a capital D) indicates the cultural and political position of Deaf people whose first language is BSL.
- Hearing-impaired includes all those people who may be described as hard of hearing or deaf, but who neither identify with Deaf culture nor use BSL as a language.
- The word disabled is universally preferred by disabled people, and is used throughout this report. As a generic term, it can also include deaf or visually-impaired people. Its opposite is the term non-disabled.

Contributors

The contributors to this research were predominantly disabled people. Where they were not, they were experienced advocates with regular contact with disabled people.

The disabled people who contributed were almost exclusively arts-literate people educated to degree-level. Some had also worked in museum and gallery settings; some had worked on the development of programmes connected with the visual arts. A few interviewees were students or volunteer workers with less than a degree standard of formal education – they offered a valuable insight into the impact of museum services on new attendees.

Interviewees were also often experienced museum visitors. Galleries they had visited covered an international range from New York and St Petersburg to other collections around London and Britain.

This report benefits from the diversity of experience, opinion and knowledge offered by the contributors, who are credited in an appendix.

Executive Summary

When the V&A access programme was first devised, it had as its principles that it would provide

- An alternative to visiting
- A way to get across a barrier caused by impairment
- An introduction or a way to get in, which might lead people to come back

In evaluation, it has succeeded on some of these counts. For most of the visually-impaired people who use the programme, it does provide an alternative to visiting – an informal and supported route to understanding the collections and major exhibitions.

As a way to get across a barrier caused by impairment, it succeeds with some visually-impaired people by offering them the chance to handle things and have them described. For other visually-impaired people, this is not enough, and they feel that there needs to be more access to more objects. For deaf people, it does not overcome a barrier, but rather underlines it by providing a lecture programme which disappoints in its quality of interpretation, timetabling and the availability of information about it.

As an introduction or way to get in, the programme fails because it does not include cross-marketing which might encourage access programme visitors to take up other opportunities. For deaf people, it works rather in reverse, since they may already visit but are not encouraged to attend the BSL lectures, through absence of information.

Strengths and weaknesses
The primary strength which the V&A has was mentioned by almost all disabled interviewees. It lies in the quality and variety of the collection, and the knowledgeability of the staff. Interviewees mentioned:
The "fantastic" collections
The beautiful building
The atmosphere of the galleries
The high standard and detail of information given
The knowledgeability of everyone concerned.

The access programme harnesses these strengths best in the talks for visually-impaired people, where the quality and variety are used to the advantage of a regular group of attendees.

1 Context

1.1 Background

The V&A Education department commissioned an evaluation of the Access Programme in October 1999, following a tendering and selection process. The research followed other initiatives within the museum which studied access from a buildings-related angle, and from the perspective of the access requirements of the redisplay of the British Galleries.

The V&A has offered elements of an access programme since 1988, when the present post-holder first initiated events which offered interpretation for visually-impaired and deaf people. The programme was a response to the changing climate of opinion, and offered an opportunity to bring people into the museum who felt they could not access the museum because of their diminishing powers of sight or hearing.

The access programme now includes regular touch tours, sign language interpreted lectures and group visits organized in response to requests. A Braille/large print/tape "tour in a bag" is available from the information desks and sound enhancement equipment is available in the lecture theatre and for the use of tour guides. There is no dedicated provision for people with other impairments including mobility impairment, who are generally expected to integrate into the museum-visiting public.

Disabled people in Britain are now estimated to form 15% of the population, and with the ageing profile of the population, this percentage can be expected to rise and to represent a conservative estimate. Most disabled people do not belong to a culturally distinct group and many do not identify with or use the term disabled. *(For more background and statistical information, see appendix one).*

In London, there are more opportunities in the arts for disabled people than elsewhere, and the existence of politically and culturally distinct groups such as those that exist in Disability Arts is more prevalent. The changing legislative context makes more disabled people conscious of their power and rights as consumers, and therefore more inclined to request and use services. This consumer identity can be expected to develop rapidly over the next few years.

*Part 3 of **the** Disability Discrimination Act (DDA),* which came into force in October 1999, places a responsibility on providers of services to provide them for disabled people, or to make reasonable alternative provision. Services in the museum context can include the information supporting displays and the services such as cafe and shop which form part of the visiting experience, but could also include, for example, access to collections as a research tool or access to archives. The DDA places the responsibility for predicting the needs of disabled customers with the service provider. In other words, the museum must now expect to have disabled customers, and meet their predictable needs. It is not sufficient to respond to a customer request or to indicate that it was not known that customers

might want certain services (for example, large print or taped information) where these are entirely predictable.

To meet the requirements of the DDA, service providers must inform themselves about the needs of disabled people, provide reasonable services to meet these needs, and offer alternative methods of using the service where the need cannot be met. Reasons for not meeting a need are that it is unreasonable, or that the cost cannot be met. Large organizations such as the V&A are unlikely to succeed with a defence on the grounds of cost if the improvements are reasonable (e.g., large print, tape). It is also not defensible to charge disabled customers more for an augmented service (i.e., to pass on costs of provision directly, such as charging for a tape if a leaflet is free).

This report is provided as a supportive measure to meeting the requirements of DDA part 3, and places the programme for disabled people within a marketing and customer service context. The report is provided in the context of social and legislative change which is happening as a fact, and not as an aspirational document based on equal opportunities principles. This offers the V&A an opportunity to be a field leader in services which create access in a positive and customer-orientated way. The guiding principle is that disabled people should have choices in how they use the museum, and the right to access it fully. On the evidence of experience in the United States, where legislation was implemented years ago, within the foreseeable future this will be the cultural norm.

1.2 The brief

The V&A Education Department brief set out a series of questions to be answered, under the broad description of evaluating the access programmes and services, with a view to ensuring that they are as effective as possible.

The questions covered:
Numbers – can the take-up be improved?
Content – is the range of topics and formats broad enough?
Publicity – how appealing is the information? How could it be improved?
Networks – how successful are current mailing and publicity systems?
The booking process – how much extra information has to be sought, do booking arrangements cause any difficulties?
Touch tours – are they what visually-impaired people want? Are there other types of session which might attract more or new people?
Galleries – can touch objects be found easily, how do they get used?
BSL lectures – are they what deaf people want? Why have the numbers dropped? What else could be offered?
Independent visitors – should the department offer anything further?
Carers – do they need more support?
Volunteer escorts – what do disabled people feel about the service? How can training be improved?

In tendering for the contract, the researcher augmented the brief with the following summary of aims:

Aim of the research
To evaluate the existing education access programme and establish areas of strength in the services it delivers to disabled people. To establish areas for development, and make recommendations on directions to take to strengthen these. To provide some analysis of the level of take-up of services by disabled visitors.

1.3 The researcher

Annie Delin is a disability consultant, researcher and trainer who has been active in the arts since 1983. Her work includes assessing capital lottery grant applications for the Arts Council of England, reporting on the implications of the DDA part 3 for the BBC and providing training for a range of groups from special needs school pupils to Regional Arts Board staff and clients.

In a museum context, Annie has co-ordinated the ground-breaking Drawbridge Access Advisory Group at Nottingham Castle Museum for five years, and has provided consultancy on access issues including display, marketing, staff awareness and visitor centre design. She researched and wrote an article on provision for disabled people in Australian Museums for Museums Journal, and is to present a paper on social inclusion at an international conference in Leicester in March 2000. Her range of experience in the museums setting therefore embraces issues of public consultation, imagery and representation, and building and gallery design.

Her clients have included the Galleries of Justice (Nottingham), the Regimental Museum of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings among many others. Annie lectures on consultation and inclusion to students at Leicester University Department of Museum Studies and Nottingham Trent University Heritage Studies.

1.4 Methodology

The initial intended methodology of the research was to identify users of the existing scheme, to interview them about their experience and to compare this against the expectations and perspective of non visitors. Evaluating the perspective of disabled people visiting the museum without using the access programme services would be done by an informal survey of visitors over a single day.

For various reasons, the methodology was revised at an early stage. The reasons included the obvious unreliability of the mailing list which would provide contacts

with visitors, as this was visibly inadequate and out of date. Low visitor numbers, particularly for BSL interpreted lectures, made it difficult to establish a meaningful enquiry among previous visitors. The inadequacy of the marketing networks also made it likely that non-users would know little about the V&A programme, making enquiry insubstantial. In consultation with the V&A, the following methodology for enquiry was therefore constructed.

- **Familiarise with events and services:** this was done by attending those events taking place within the research time-frame, and by making a visit as a wheelchair-using member of the public.
- **Interview staff and volunteers:** to establish the hierarchy of responsibility, and to gain insight into the actual working of the programme and related aspects of museum practice.
- **Sample integrated visitor numbers:** using admissions data on concessionary ticket sales and an enquiry form completed by admissions and information desk staff.
- **Interview previous users of the touch tour programme:** using contacts supplied by the Education department.
- **Interview expert advisers on visual impairment and deaf issues:** using recognised sources of expertise and advice.
- **Review comparable programmes:** using guidance from interviewees above on successful programmes elsewhere.
- **A focus group on visual impairment issues:** non-users of the programme who would describe their initial response to the "tour in a bag" and to a guided handling session.
- **websites review:** a controlled evaluation of websites comparable to that of the V&A.

2 Findings

2.1 The access programme

The founding principles of the access programme devised in 1988 were that it should offer a way to gain access to the museum either for new people or for people who could not come any more due to increasing impairments caused by ageing. The roles which it was expected to fill were to offer:

- An alternative to visiting
- A way to get across a barrier caused by impairment
- An introduction or a way to get in, which might lead people to come back

The emphasis in attracting people to participate in the programme was that they would be people who wanted to use the V&A. In other words, a pre-existing attraction to the museum was presumed to exist — the programme would offer a way to negotiate other barriers for people who already had the aspiration to attend, and possibly some level of knowledge on the collection.

At the time at which it began, the programme was forward-thinking and innovative in considering the social and support needs of people with sensory impairments. The dialogue on touch in museums was *very* much in its infancy, and few other programmes were running. Museum approaches centred around deciding whether requests could be addressed on an ad hoc basis.

The three main approaches of the programme were to programme talks for deaf people using BSL interpreters, touch tours and talks for visually-impaired people using audio-description and handling, and the support of volunteer escorts during these programmed events, for booked groups and for individuals wishing to use the museum with support.

2.2 Touch Tours

2.2.1 Audio-description

Figures for attendance at touch talks and BSLI lectures are available on the years from 1995/6. These show attendance at the following levels:

Year	touch number		average	BSL number		average
95/6	7	71	*10*	2	13	*6.5*
96/7	5	62	*12.4*	3	53	*17.*
97/8	12	116	9.6	3	16	5.3
98/9	14	136	9.7	7	12	1.7
99/00	10	106	*10.6*	*3*	*7*	2.3

[99/00 excludes March figures. Average = average number attending per talk over the year]

2.2.2 Handling/touch

Some curators state that there are no **conservation issues** that are not overridden by the imperative of offering access. ("Unless an object is exceptionally precious, almost anything can be made available for handling"). For other curators, the first priority is to establish whether objects could be damaged or worn by handling, or whether there are risk elements such as parts which have already been damaged and replaced. Only then is the selection made on the grounds of variety, as described above. In this respect, the approach to "handleability" is a personal one driven by varying approaches to conservation among curators.

Once the curators have selected a range, the access programme co-ordinator makes a further selection based on her experience of what works or does not. Advice has been taken in the past (1988) from William Kirby, a visually-impaired former art teacher and one escort has a perspective based on previous experience with blind students. Additionally, if there are two sessions, comments from people at the first fine-tune what is selected for the second.

Advice from visually-impaired people on principles for handling has never been formally sought, and no external advice or guidelines from organisations is used. The response to proposing this as a future action brought mixed responses – some curators suggested that it would be time-consuming, unwieldy and unnecessary given the existing expertise of the co-ordinator, while others expressed interest in having guidelines which would offer insight into ways of selecting suitable items, or in developing dialogue with blind people about what was interesting and what was not.

Again, regular **visitors expressed themselves satisfied** with the choice of objects. *"I'm an information junkie and there are few things that really bore me."* *"I find something to learn in every object. The more variety the better."*

Less regular visitors also enjoyed the choice, but were more inclined to ask for more.
"I   want   to   be   able   to   touch   everything."
"Sighted people don't have their choice limited to one or two objects, so why should   we?"
"I tried to touch things in the galleries but was told off"

There was also debate about the value of the handling experience **when wearing gloves,** with some people thinking this was a reasonable conservation measure and others saying it made the handling experience less valuable. From

observation, even some regulars may be less satisfied than they are prepared to admit. An exchange overheard during a visit was:
Volunteer *"You can feel the detail of the design,"*
Participant *"Well, no I can't, actually*

The handling environment was an area of mixed opinions. To be seated and to have a table on which objects could be placed and passed around was regarded as important by all, but for some participants there also needed to be quiet and better light than is available in galleries. Others felt that by retreating to a special room they lost the gallery atmosphere which contributed to the experience.

From observation, I considered that the **technique of passing round objects** one by one diminished the chance for participation for visitors, although it is obviously seen as being helpful for describing individual objects. Participants reported that if there were a larger group they had often forgotten what they were handling by the time it reached them, and by asking questions they confused the conversation and chaos ensued. Their solution to this was to keep the group to no more than four or five people. My suggestion would be to try and provide a selection of similar items that illustrate one point in a variety of ways, so that everyone has something in their hand as the description is being given. However, this is an area which could be tested through consultation.

2.2.3 Strengths
The strengths identified by repeat attendees describing their experience are as follows:

"The choice of objects to handle is pretty wide. Sometimes only holding an object in your hand will tell you what it's like. The description usually tells me what I want to know, but sometimes questions from people who can see more than me fill in the gaps."

"It is a public event, but the group is small. It's a loose group like a far flung family coming together for a reunion. You can't have many people — a large group of blind people doesn't work."

"My interest is in arts but unless guided I can't visit museums. What the V&A has got to offer is not available elsewhere."

"The thing on William Morris was good because it was chronological and had enough information in it. They even gave us some textile to touch which was very interesting."

"I have found the programme really enthralling. The explanation has been really good and the informality works for example in the William Morris talk where we asked questions and exchanged ideas."

These quotations illustrate a consensus that the talks and tours offer:

- Quality of information and subject matter
- Variety of subjects and of objects to handle
- Stimulation — through questioning, conversation and presentation
- Informality and support — encouraged by the small group size

2.2.4 Weaknesses

From observation and interview, the programme risks falling into a cosiness which inadvertently excludes people who do not fit the existing profile. Friendships have developed within the group, and the volunteer escorts and programme co-ordinator also show familiarity with the regulars. For a newcomer, this could create a feeling of exclusion. In interview regular attendees referred to *"some noisy old deaf men who stopped coming, thank goodness,"* and to the inconveniences of a larger group making the handing round of handling items more tedious.

Younger attendees (some of whom had attended only once) referred to *"feeling that I had stumbled into a WI meeting"* and to the escorts being *"friendly, but didn't talk to me much."* Interviewees also said that the tours did not go into enough depth, or cover enough subjects, which they were interested in.

Those who attended less regularly also commented that they received only specialist information on touch tours, despite being on the mailing list. They would prefer to receive information on other opportunities and events at the V&A.

V&A staff and regular participants alike set great store by the personality and expertise of the access programme co-ordinator. While this is a strength in some ways, it also makes the whole programme dependent on one individual which poses a threat should that person leave or transfer attention to other endeavours. There is no "system" or external advisors who would be able to develop the programme with a new co-ordinator, and no internal commitment to developing knowledge among a range of individuals.

These comments illustrate possible weaknesses in:
- Excluding newcomers through a "clubby" atmosphere
- Exuding an "older" approach which puts off younger attendees
- Not focussing in depth on specialist interests
- Not converting attendees to participation in other museum activities by cross-marketing in accessible formats (tape, large print or braille)
- Resting too heavily on the advice and talents of one person

2.2.5 Opportunities

The success of the talks for visually impaired visitors, on their own terms, offers and opportunity to develop a **more regularised club** exploiting the sense of belonging already demonstrated by regular attendees.

There is also an opportunity to move on from the current formula to find ways to meet the needs of **younger visitors,** and to increase the number of people willing to attend regularly.

Attendees demonstrating interest in the museum and its collections could be converted to integrated participation by **cross-marketing.** Those with specialist interests may be interested in joining short courses or other formal education events.

The **quality of the museums collections and expertise** forms one of its most significant attractions to this group as to others. The V&A has an opportunity to build on this by exploring innovations in participation for visually-impaired people which match the quality of information and objects with quality of presentation and interpretation.

2.2.6 Threats

Because of the **age profile** of the current regular attendees, there is a risk of a gradual decline in numbers attending the existing programme, as attendees become more frail and less inclined to attend events on a regular basis.

Increased competition from other museums now running touch tours, art discussion groups and audio-description means that the existing pool of attendees have other calls on their time and interests. One loyal regular commented *"If the V&A and the National Gallery had something on the same day I would probably choose either by which one I heard about first, or by whether I was interested in the subject."* In other words, the loyalty which has developed would not protect the programme from competition.

Younger attendees may not be converted into a new loyal audience for the programme in its existing format. Some of those interviewed said that they found the approach of the escorts and tour leaders patronising, and that the talk was boring and too long. These changes in self-awareness (politicisation) and in attention-span or range of interests will characterise a younger audience.

2.2.7 Summary — touch tours

The existing format of talks and tours for visually-impaired visitors meets a particular need in a popular format which has attracted a loyal following. The profile of those attending is narrow both in age-group terms (with certain exceptions) and in terms of other demographic indicators. The numerical evidence of repeat attendance is not commensurate with the V&A's position as a national collection of excellence.

The satisfaction which the programme engenders reinforces a sense of comfort among organisers and volunteers, who probably do not encounter

any negative feedback. An impartial evaluation of the programme's success has to be viewed within a limited context. It is good at what it does, but it does not do enough. In geographical, age group, subject matter and outreach terms the programme should be developing faster and creating more varied opportunities for attendees.

The programme has hit upon successful approaches to handling and audio-description, but interest is not shown in development of these techniques, or in consultation which would develop understanding (as well as creating networking opportunities which will be discussed later). In this sense the programme works in a vacuum and may be unaware of new ideas and innovations which open visual arts to visually-impaired people. More crucially, the museum is not seen as any kind of field-leader in developing ideas.

The existing programme is vulnerable to deterioration for a number of reasons. The process rests on the expertise and guidance of one individual to the exclusion of external influences, rendering it vulnerable if the individual's attention is directed elsewhere. The age group of the attendees makes it likely to be a diminishing group, while younger attendees express feelings of exclusion or patronisation which make them reluctant to attend again (although some do, because the objects and exhibits they want to see are here). There is limited knowledge of competition from other galleries, and the V&A's approach by comparison to the competition is now rather staid – this makes the programme vulnerable to competition, and unlikely to be able to respond to a more demanding and consumer-rights-conscious audience.

2.3 Lectures and talks for deaf people

Over the past five years there has been an average of three to four talks per year aimed at BSL-using deaf people. These have included talks by hearing lecturers interpreted in BSL, and some lectures by BSL using lecturers – one specialising in Medieval and Revival art, and one general artist capable of taking on anything.

Attendance by deaf people at these events has declined over the period. A peak during 1996-7 is partly attributable to a personal following for BSL lecturer Serena Cant (although other lectures she has given have been less well-attended). Attendance by deaf people is also observed as being influenced by subject, with photography and painting being more popular. However, on such low attendance figures it is difficult to generalise about successful or unsuccessful topics.

The lectures usually take the form of a public slide lecture at which an interpreter is present. The room used has an induction loop. Slides are shown through again after the lecture if deaf people wish to have the opportunity to see them after focussing on the interpreter during the lecture.

From observation, I felt that the integrated approach tended to act as an opportunity for hearing audience members to have their awareness raised, rather than as a constructive format for deaf people. While awareness-raising is a valuable side-effect of good provision for deaf people, when it is the only apparent effect of the programme it strays towards being exploitative in the sense that it generates "feel good" for hearing people (organisers and audience) and not access for deaf people.

The attendance level at these events, and the networking problems identified later **(see section2.3.8)** mean that this programme is effectively moribund. Before evaluating possible ways forward, it is important to look at factors for the lack of success of this project. **NB — because the programme currently targets BSL users by offering interpreted lectures, this part of the evaluation looks at the deaf community and Deaf culture, but not at provision for hearing-impaired people.**

2.3.1 Consultation

The deaf awareness of the access programme co-ordinator has been raised by attendance at a Sympathetic Hearing Scheme course and through studying BSL to Level 1. However, the insight this basic-level awareness offers is not sufficient to devise a scheme without input from people more immersed in the distinctly different structure of deaf culture.

The co-ordinator is aware of the most appropriate organisations to fill in this important information gap (for example, Deafworks consultancy, London Shape Deaf Arts Forum) but these organisations state in interview that they have never been consulted by the V&A and, in some cases, that advice proffered has been misunderstood or rejected. The research brief stated that "informal evaluation" has been carried out, but there is no evidence of where this evaluation has taken place, or has informed the BSL lecture programme.

2.3.2 Use of interpreters/lecturers

The selection of interpreters and lecturers in a programme of this nature is fraught with difficulties. Starting from the base of a shortage of interpreters in general, there is then a need to identify interpreters with specialist understanding of the terminology and culture of visual arts. Understandably, these individuals are in demand.

Certain interpreters may be more or less popular with particular communities – because of interpretation style, familiarity (good links with particular Deaf clubs) or even over-exposure (becoming ubiquitous because of popularity).

2.3.3 Presentation style

The choice of BSL lecturers is also a sensitive matter. In the case of one lecturer, a deaf person who attended some of the V&A lectures explained to me that the lecturer's BSL had been learnt as a second language, and was virtually unintelligible to the deaf audience. Yet because he was a BSL user, no interpreter had been provided – this made the lecture pointless and rendered it impossible to ask questions, because the lecturer did not understand the fluent BSL of some audience members. In a similar case, the Serpentine Gallery had used a BSL-using lecturer, an interpreter and a voicer.
"Just because a person uses BSL doesn't make them a good presenter."

2.3.4 Organisational openness

Successful organisations (in deaf access terms) were credited with being "listening" organisations who constantly sought deaf opinion. This is a deeper issue than it appears, because the success of projects at other galleries may also rest on a co-operative approach to developing access *with* deaf people, rather than *for* them. Especially in the Deaf community, this is crucial – it has been modernised into the concept of "ownership" in other circles, but among Deaf people it is often true that they attend events, or watch people, who they view to be "theirs" by previous involvement. (See case studies on Whitechapel Gallery and Maritime Museum).
"At the moment it's like they're up there and we're down here — it needs to be more equal".

2.3.5 Risk-taking

Culturally, and by contrast to working with visually-impaired people, developing a programme accessible to deaf people is an exercise which can feel more risky to a hearing person. One educationalist likened it to "swimming in shark-infested waters" by comparison to working with visually impaired people.
"It's a hard audience to get right because it's so political and forthright."

Misunderstandings arise, criticism is immediate and vocal, audiences stay away. Deaf culture is a robust and confident culture which is not based in a charity model of gratitude. In some respects, it foreshadows the consumer-based culture which will eventually characterise wider access to all disabled people in being demanding, assertive and varied in its needs.

It is easy in this context to be timid about initiatives, and to try to stay with safe practices which already work elsewhere or for other audiences. This is unlikely to be successful, both because it needs to compete with established programmes elsewhere, and because deaf audiences may not respond to the same practices as others.
"We've started to get to the limits of what can be done and need to start taking risks again — to push back the boundaries of what we know we can do. I would love, for example, to see someone taking the risk of having two presenters — one deaf and one hearing — debating an artist or a movement from different perspectives.

2.3.6 The social dimension

Successful initiatives elsewhere have found that a social dimension to the programme contributes to the development of an audience. The V&A lecture programme, while not preventing social time or museum visits after the lecture, makes no arrangement for feedback time, closed Q&A for deaf people, or discussion groups, after the lecture.

"Going to a talk is not just a study experience, it's a social experience, and the more galleries think about how they can improve the social experience, the better the response they will get."

Galleries who facilitate this social dimension find that it has other benefits — facilitating feedback, developing networks, allowing them to learn about other practices and even introducing them to interpreters, lecturers and artists from the deaf community's own circles.

2.3.7 Getting information

Deaf people interviewed commented on the difficulty of finding out about BSL talks at the V&A, and this included those who were already visitors to the museum. The fact that there was no separate flyer about BSL talks, that no information panels were placed around the museum, and that the events programme had such small, dense print made it hard for people to get information even when they were searching for it.

"There is a lack of information, full stop. I found it hard to find anything about BSL talks and I think a lot of deaf people won't because they won't go through a lot of text looking for it. It says "signed talk" which isn't helpful because that doesn't say whether its BSL or SSE, it doesn't say who the interpreter is. Just saying "Art Deco" isn't enough — is that textiles, ceramics, art? There seems to be an assumption that they don't want to over-inform us, but you can go too far the other way."

These comments came from a visual arts graduate who had worked in an art gallery. For other interviewees (including a deaf staff member at the V&A) there was simply no knowledge that there might be interpreted talks, so they weren't looking for information. Interviewees also commented that the information didn't seem to be carried on the website, on Read Hear (Teletext) or in other places where they would notice information.

For those attending BSL lectures, the absence of information adversely affected the experience — some commented that their arrival seemed to be unexpected, that staff did not know how to communicate with them, that no notices advised them where to meet, and that they spent long periods wandering around trying to find the lecture before arriving late.

2.3.8 Marketing and networking

There are 50,000 BSL- using deaf people in Britain and of these 38,000 are under the age of 60. It is a mobile, connected and social community, and the networks are especially good in London.

The evidence of the mailing list (and see later comments **section 2.7.5)** is that there is a poverty of information on how to reach and network with deaf people — or at a basic level, how to send out information to them. Some of the most relevant principle contacts in deaf arts networks commented that they couldn't remember ever being sent information – this included people named in interview by the access programme co-ordinator, and people who had attended the BSL talks more than once.

One interviewee, speaking of the success of the Maritime Museum's programme, defined its success factors including *"It is open to ideas and it has a culture of searching out audiences. "*

Conversely, the culture of the V&A seems to be more inclined to insist that audiences demonstrate commitment to finding information before allowing them to have it.

"The V&A needs to sell themselves more and not rely on us to contact them or do their publicity for them."

Networking with deaf people is an interactive process, which doesn't just rest on sending information out — the social dimension mentioned above, and dialogue with organisations which listen to and represent deaf audiences and artists, will yield dividends for programme planning and audience development.

2.3.9 Taking it slowly

All the consultants and educationalists interviewed spoke of the need not to be over-ambitious, and to allow the programme to develop slowly:

"Take things slowly — the V&A rushed it at the beginning and had a flurry of interest which fell away. Build it up."

"It takes people several times of coming to develop their confidence to interact.. You have to give people different levels to get involved so that they can start developing confidence. "

2.3.10 Timetabling

Three or four talks a year may not be sufficient to develop a sense of dependability, and the idea that BSL is something the V&A does. Successful programmes elsewhere have provided regularity and a predictable pattern, which allows people to plan events in and to see them as a fixed point in the calendar. A recognisable date – first Saturday of the month, last Wednesday – gives the programme an identity. It also needs to be researched whether daytime events are suitable for a younger community (as the BSL-using deaf community is) who are more likely to be employed or studying. Evenings and weekends may be the best options.

"It has a pattern so that people know it is there and we establish ourselves. It shows we take it seriously — stopping and starting isn't a good idea."

2.3.11 Using existing interest and visitors

Deaf people do come to the V&A – in fact, all those interviewed were either regular visitors or had been recently (one specifically to gain an impression prior to being interviewed). Deaf people were using the museum informally on two of the days when I visited. Visual art has no intrinsic barrier for deaf people – it's the programme that goes with the art, and the way in which it is described which creates the barrier. It should be possible to harness the existing accessibility of the collection to develop an approach which gives deaf people credit for the interest they already show, and brings them into the programme more fully.

2.3.12 Deaf history/Deaf art

The exploration of deaf culture is moving towards deaf history and arts, and there are now a researchers looking at artists who were deaf and identifying their relationship with today's community. The Maritime Museum has used this interest to develop a theme for some of their access work with BSL users, and articles in Deaf Arts UK are thought by Deaf arts specialists to be developing audiences for the galleries that show their work.

Interviewees asked whether the V&A were interested in this movement, and how they could support it:

"*Is there some way for the museum to support deaf people exploring their own culture? There are hundreds of deaf students studying in London — art history students, textile students. It gives people a sense of connection — helping them to learn about a culture which goes back a long way would be extremely popular.*"

2.3.13 Summary

Because of the limitations of the mailing list, this part of the evaluation concentrates on opinions from informed individuals who work and socialise in the arts. It presents their perception of some of the problems which could have affected the success of the BSL lecture programme. In some cases, this is also from a personal perspective, those interviewed having attended the lectures or visited the museum.

The interviewees proposed a whole raft of reasons why a programme might not succeed, and pointers towards future success. A complex combination of these factors may well be at the root of the problems with this part of the programme. A later section of the report **(see section 5)** presents suggestions for moving forward.

2.4 The access programme — overview

When the access programme was first devised, it had as its principles that it would provide
- An alternative to visiting
- A way to get across a barrier caused by impairment
- An introduction or a way to get in, which might lead people to come back

In evaluation, it has succeeded on some of these counts. For most of the visually-impaired people who use the programme, it does provide an alternative to visiting – an informal and supported route to understanding the collections and major exhibitions.

As a way to get across a barrier caused by impairment, it succeeds with some visually-impaired people by offering them the chance to handle things and have them described. For other visually-impaired people, this is not enough, and they feel that there needs to be more access to more objects. For deaf people, it does not overcome a barrier, but rather underlines it by providing a lecture programme which disappoints in its quality of interpretation, timetabling and the availability of information about it.

As an introduction or way to get in, the programme fails because it does not include cross-marketing which might encourage access programme visitors to take up other opportunities. For deaf people, it works rather in reverse, since they may already visit but are not encouraged to attend the BSL lectures, through absence of information.

Numerically, however, the take-up of the programme is not of the order that might be expected of a national collection. Programmes elsewhere (see later case studies) do better on numbers, without there being any significant non-variable factors which might affect this (i.e., their programme serves the same audience, in the same city, with collections of comparable significance).

2.5 The access programme — other activities

Additional aspects of the education access team's provision are:
- Tours in bags – tours in braille, large print and on tape
- Support for group visits
- Volunteer escorts
- Practical workshops (drawing, photography)

2.5.1 Tours in bags

Tours in bags are available at the information desks at Cromwell Road and Exhibition Road entrance. There is a bag at each desk, in which there are tapes, braille and large print guides. Two tours are available – an introductory tour and "Motifs in Art" (which is also available in French and Italian). The introductory tour is always ready-loaded into the personal stereo provided.

The tours have been available since 1992. The introductory tour has been updated since then (date unknown). The tour was evaluated by asking regular visitors whether they had used it, and by asking a focus group of new visually-impaired visitors to test the tour as part of their visit.

Regular visually-impaired visitors were vague about the existence of the tour. Some said they did not know it existed, and others that they meant to try it but had not got around to it. One said she had tried the tape and found it very good, but had to finish after 30 minutes because she did not have time.

The focus group included four women aged between 18 and 30. Three were blind and one visually-impaired. Two were braille readers. They were supported by two RNIB outreach workers.

The focus group requested the tape at the information desk. Information desk staff did not know of the existence of the tape, could not find it and were then unsure how it worked or what its content was. The total delay in finding and starting the tour was 25 minutes.

The focus group then gave the following evaluation.

Getting hold of the tape: *"We waited and waited, and nobody knew how anything worked. We felt that they were not ready for visually-impaired visitors. We were not treated as others and I felt that we were giving them extra work and trouble. I didn't like that feeling. They have the equipment so why is it not ready for us?"*
Following the directions: *"You wouldn't be able to find anything on your own — you would need a sighted companion. It gives directions which are no good for a blind person — for example, saying turn right but not saying which way you should be facing when you start. We had a hard job following the instructions."*

Description of objects: *"Once you find things it does tell you about it. The description was really good — it tells you what colour things are and how to feel it".*

Carrying the bag: *"It was much too heavy and when you've got a stick and you're holding the arm of your companion I don't know how you're supposed to carry the bag and feel things, too. Carrying the braille guide around was a complete waste of time, just extra weight."*

Using braille: *"The braille was very strange. Some was grade 1 (which everyone can read) and some in Grade 2 which is a sort of shorthand. It wouldn't satisfy anyone because whichever you prefer it wasn't all in that grade. I don't know when you're supposed to read the braille, what with walking around and feeling the objects. But some people prefer not to use a tape because then they can get the atmosphere of the gallery."*

Touch objects: *"Were brilliant. The vase was really lovely and I liked the silver room."*

Walking round the gallery: *"I felt frustrated that we couldn't get access to other things. It's really silly to go all that way just to see a head. There were long walks without seeing anything — we were alright because we had Michelle with us describing things to us, but the description didn't point out all the things we were walking past. It could have just said what galleries they were and what type of things were in there. I felt I was missing out."*

Gaining access to other exhibits: *"There should be more audio displays and more push button, interactive things. There were some Korean TV screens and we were disappointed that out of three not one of them spoke. There should be more touch things, too. Sighted people don't just have a couple of things available to them."*

Using the guide on your own: *"Don't even think about it. The layout of the museum is really complicated and you couldn't do it on your own."*

Coming back/recommending to friends: *"I would come back, but I would bring a friend and spend more time. I would say to other people go, but take a sighted person who doesn't mind spending hours and hours describing things."*

The group were asked to identify a best thing and a worst thing about the tour. Best thing: Being in a museum in England. Feeling the vase. The silver room. The idea of a TV with description.
Worst thing: Not being able to visit the Islamic history. Waiting for the tapes was embarrassing. Carrying the Braille guide around was a waste of time. Walking through things with no description.

Summary

In use, the "tour in a bag" has deficiencies which make it an unsatisfactory tool. The quality of description could be extended to create a more detailed audio-tour for use by blind people who are escorted, since the possibility of self-guiding seems to be limited by the tape directions and the building itself.

2.5.2 Group visits

The possible evaluation of the programme of support for group visits rested on three contacts given for groups of disabled people who had visited recently. These were a group from Guide Dogs for the Blind, a group of Deaf Asian people and a project led by Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES).

One of the contacts could not be traced, one declined to be involved in the research, and the WAES contact was interviewed informally. Although the WAES project has been successful, and is to lead to an exhibition of work, I do not feel that this offers an insight into the programme as a whole. The visit was led by support workers who rotate their activities around museums. The tutor was clearly satisfied with the support she was receiving from the Education department.

2.5.3 Volunteer Escorts

The Volunteer Escort service is co-ordinated by the Access co-ordinator. It consists of volunteers who know the museum well and already volunteer as information desk staff or tour guides. Staff are given a half day of initial training which was described as Disability Awareness Training but which is actually access training – learning routes around the museum, their role as an escort and the type of support that might be expected of them. Escorts referred to some areas of the work they do – audio description, for example – as just "feeling their way in" to the area. There is no Disability Equality or Awareness Training.

The volunteers are committed individuals with experience ranging from one to 10 years as volunteers. In most cases their principal contact with disabled people is through the Escort scheme, although some have other experience (particularly with visually-impaired people) and some observe other initiatives by, for example, attending audio-described theatre.
Volunteers were used during 1998/99 on average twice a month, the vast majority of their work being to support the talks and tours for visually-impaired visitors. Escorts believe that the scheme would be used more if it was better promoted – it is currently seldom used by individuals.

The relationship between escort and visitor can vary between providing a guiding service personalised to the needs of the visitor, and being a companion or friend to them during their visit. The tone of the relationship is set by the visitor, with some wishing to engage intellectually and others less so. There has

never been a visitor who wished the escort simply to push the wheelchair and nothing further. Escorts are flexible in their approach and negotiate each relationship individually.

Escort schemes also operate elsewhere in the arts, and in other contexts. Shape London organises a ticket and escort scheme which could include the V&A in its remit (although the service has almost never been requested for the V&A). In this case, escorts are recruited and trained in Disability Awareness. The contractual arrangement and structure of the scheme has been formalised (see appended materials).

In retail, the use of a "shoppers assistant" is offered by many supermarkets. This model is instructive as it is an "on-demand" service (although regular customers know how to select non-busy periods) and effectively requires no relationship between escort and customer. From experience of using this service, I would say that personality and disability awareness do affect the quality of the experience, and that a poorly matched set of expectations can produce embarrassment for the customer (and probably the escort). The scheme has the advantage of being customer focussed and on-demand, being viewed by the retailer as a weapon in the armoury of competition – a means of attracting customers.

In interview with the escorts, I explored two possible future scenarios:
- If the scheme was better used
- If customers became more demanding

If the scheme was better used escorts felt they would have to ration the time people got, and more people would be needed to run the scheme. The escorting role is a tiring, draining one and involves a lot of responding on the spot, negotiating routes that are accessible and thinking on your feet. A busier scheme might need to restrict the number of galleries a visitor could go to.

If customers became more demanding, opinions varied. Some said that was why they were there – that in a sense the volunteer's role was to give something back however demanding it was. Others said that, as volunteers, they were under no obligation to stay and would not have to put up with it if they felt demands to be unreasonable.

Volunteers stated that the service could be better if:
- It were better promoted
- Warders and information desk staff were more helpful

There were a good support manager with whom things could be discussed (though all spoke highly of the current co-ordinator)
Volunteers could be on standby (but may need to be paid for this).

Existing users of the scheme praised the friendliness and knowledgeability of the escorts. However, it was again difficult to assess the scheme's success for

individuals as there were too few who had used the services and contact details were not available for these.

The scheme's strengths lie in:
- The flexibility and experience of individuals
- Knowledgeability of escorts/guides
- Commitment and willingness of co-ordinator and guides

Its weaknesses are in:
- Poor promotion
- Limited disability awareness, and what exists in a narrow context
- Need to be pre-booked
- Lack of support from warder and information staff (to support escorts and promote their existence)

2.5.4 Practical workshops

A number of workshops were described, most of which had taken place comparatively recently. They included:
- Photography in the Canon Gallery (visually-impaired group)
- Drawing (visually-impaired group)
- Photography and print-making (Westminster Adult Education Service).

The workshops had arisen out of requests, either by individuals or by group organisers. There had been imaginative approaches to exploring the abilities and perspectives of attendees, and curators had participated wholeheartedly. Results had been exhibited and formed a kind of awareness-raising exercise for other gallery visitors, by showing the abilities of people, particularly with visual impairments. In the case of the Canon Gallery, the workshop had led on to the development of some permanent resources and planning of follow-up workshops. Participant satisfaction was high.
Some concern was expressed by curators that the workshops appeared to field the same core group of attendees as the talks. The view was given that it might be seen as inappropriate to invest resources repeatedly in a comparatively limited number of people's experience. All curators said that "you do tend to see the same faces."

Curators responded to requests to provide opportunities for workshops, but some said they would prefer a more interactive dialogue with the education department, in which they were able to "brainstorm" ideas and come up with more diverse and imaginative access activities. They expressed the desire to see the process become three-way, with disabled people's ideas and cultural developments feeding the discussion between curators and education department.

From observation, it was interesting that the disciplines chosen were so highly "visible" and traditionally inaccessible to visually-impaired people. This provided a significant challenge in interpretation, and was adventurous in itself. However,

there was an uncomfortable sense that the "awareness-raising" value of the subsequent exhibitions was also a driving factor, and that this could be viewed as exploitative in another context.

Summary: The workshops programme again follows the same pattern as other aspects of the access programme – it does what it does well, and those who use it are very satisfied, but it does not serve a wide enough number or range of people for the nature of the collections and museum. There is enthusiasm and potential within the museum for a wider-ranging and more innovative approach to events and workshops targeted at people with varying impairments. The existing focus on display of work and materials /articles connected with this provides a reward for participants, but also presents an uncomfortable focus on "showing what can be done" by people with impairments, which is an approach from an earlier generation, now losing currency.

2.6 Supporting integration — other activity

2.6.1 Physical access support

The range of support offered for visitors with physical or mobility impairments includes:
- Ten wheelchairs available for free loan (three different models)
- Stools available in all galleries for visitors to carry around
- Free admission for disabled person and one carer
- Ramped routes and lifts between floors, allowing access to a large percentage of the building
- Sound enhancement system available for use of guides

To gain access information, a disabled visitor would need to ring up for the access guide — the guide is clear and friendly in style, but omits information on the availability of sitting places and stools. The guide is not readily available on the information desk, and is not publicised on the website. During two visits as a visitor (one using a wheelchair) I did not find out about its existence.

A separate evaluation has commented on the physical provision within the museum. In the context of evaluating integrated use of the museum by disabled visitors, I would suggest that the availability of reasonable access provision is not supported by accessible distribution of information (and see later section on marketing 2.7)

2.6.2 Take-up by disabled visitors

Disabled visitors do use the museum — on each occasion when I have been there, disabled visitors using sticks, wheelchairs (their own and borrowed from the V&A) and hearing enhancement have been present in small numbers. The suitability of the museum for visitors with disabilities can be seen to be being tested by these visitors, who have obviously made the choice to visit independently.

In the case of these visitors, especially those who have chosen to visit as individuals, or those who are becoming disabled through ageing, targeted provision through the education department would be inappropriate. It would underline their needs at the expense of their choices.

Statistical evaluation of the integration of disabled people into the visiting public is hard to ascertain. Two forms of evaluation were used. The attendance figures for the first seven weeks of 2000 were provided by the Admissions department. These are based on the number of people claiming a concession (free entrance) on the basis of disability. They showed:

Week	total attendance	disabled people	%of total
Week 1	11,623	29	0.25

Week 2	11,995	33	0.28
Week 3	12,595	21	0.17
Week 4	12,096	30	0.25
Week 5	11,407	23	0.20
Week 6	14,357	40	0.28
Week 7	18,808	25	0.13

The percentage take-up is clearly very low given that 15% of the population are estimated to be disabled. However, factors which will influence how this shows up on admission tickets include:

- People who do not wish to claim a concession
- People who claim another concession (OAP or family)
- People who do not identify as disabled, despite an impairment

It is unlikely that these factors combined account for all the differential in figures. It is safe to estimate that the take-up by disabled visitors of the V&A's accessibility as a venue for integrated visits is exceptionally low. This should be investigated in context with gallery figures in general, and in the light of later comments on marketing and information. **(section 2.7).**

Requests by disabled people for access-related information were also evaluated using a single week sample on the admissions and information desks. Questions relating to lift and ramped access, tape tours and other aspects of provision were logged. These showed:

Question	**day 1 day 2 day 3 day 4 day 5 day 6 day 7**
Borrow wheelchair	
Ramps	
Lift	
Toilets	
Braille	*information awaited*
Tape	
Sound enhancement	
Seats/stools	
Escort	
Other	

2.6.3 Integration into the Museum's events and programme

The events and activities within the museum's programme break down into:
- Introductory tours and gallery talks
- Gallery events
- The formal education programme

Introductory tours – these are run daily and include general introductions and more specific introductions to parts of the collection. Gallery talks are focussed on the wider context and history of objects on display.

Sound enhancement equipment is available on all these tours. The attitude of individual guides influences how the equipment is used – some actively promote it as a solution to the ambient echo, others do not routinely offer it as a solution, making it harder for new or unconfident users to request it.

Guides interviewed would tailor routes of introductory tours if the disability of any participant made it evident that they needed easier routes. From experience, this was a seamless process, and the guide also made it clear when sitting places would be available, building these into the route.

Gallery events – these include family events (activity cart, back-packs, special activities) and adult programme of Saturday demonstrations and additional events focussed on special exhibitions. There is no specific focus on activity which enhances access for disabled visitors, although by its nature some will provide additional inclusion, and some tend to exclude disabled individuals (depending on whether focus is on aural or visual information, or on movement or dexterity). From memory, the Gallery Events Officer felt that there were few disabled participants in these events.

The formal education programme – disabled people do participate in short courses and formal education sessions. Because the main lecture hall has lift access and an induction loop, it presents less problems with accessibility than the seminar room, which is accessible only by stairs and has no loop. The seminar room is, however, one of the main spaces for use on formal courses.

A disabled individual who has attended many courses commented on her preference for being integrated into the programme, and not having "special" focus – this is likely to be a widely shared preference among disabled people.

"Disabled people don't want to be all bunched up with other people with other disabilities and the programme made to be different to what they would have chosen. They should be able to participate and for that to be facilitated."

However, she also articulated another widely shared feeling – of frustration at being unable to participate in courses because of the inaccessibility of the venue. She described "pleading" with organisers for a change of venue – a reduction in her personal dignity. In another case, the inability of a student to participate in a formal course has led to correspondence with Radar – this should be taken as a warning sign since Radar's lobbying section are closely involved with the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission which will enforce legislation from April.

2.6.4 Integration: summary

Disabled people are integrating into the activities of the V&A. In an entirely natural process, the activities which are made more accessible are being "colonised" by disabled people. Where activities are not accessible, the take-up by disabled people depends on the subject matter of the activity. You could argue that the gallery events programme is a "luxury", casual activity which a disabled person might regret not attending, but which can simply be ignored. However, having selected an interest from the formal programme, the disabled person is less likely to walk away if accessibility is denied – they share the responsibility for attending, some undergoing more personal discomfort or inconvenience to attend, some unable to do so unless efforts are made by the V&A.

The level of take-up of opportunities to integrate into the visitor experience and events demonstrates that all-pervading, improved access to the programme is as important as targeted programming. There are certainly as many disabled people using introductory tours, self-guided visits and the formal programme as are using the access programme.

2.7 Marketing and networking

The V&A is a museum with better than average physical access (despite a large and complex site) and support facilities. It also has a collection which is substantially accessible to deaf people, and a sympathetic programme which supports visually-impaired people. That all this is not better taken up must in part be the result of marketing which is failing to let disabled people know what is available.
"I tell my deaf friends 'come to the V&A' and they say 'What's the V&A?' They don't know" (Deaf employee)

The process of marketing to disabled people is a complex one, and constantly under research. Because disabled people do not have a universal cultural identity, nor do they belong to a clear demographic group, it is impossible to use one method to target the right audience with any certainty of effectiveness.

Marketing to disabled people has to be a combination of inclusion in mainstream materials, availability of alternative formats, development of a good reputation, targeted materials and proactive networking. The process is time-consuming and slow to develop. However, there are organisations within and beyond London who have demonstrated the effectiveness of focus in this area. The benefit is in the attraction of a market described by Toucher Rosse in recent research for the tourism industry as "the last great marketing opportunity."

Comments on marketing and networking are presented under the following headings:
- Marketing through the mainstream process
- Marketing through specific materials
- Cross-marketing
- Networking
- The database
- The website

2.7.1 Marketing through the mainstream process

For disabled people to happen upon information casually, and to demonstrate a policy of inclusiveness, it is important that information about targeted activities and access provision is included in mainstream materials.

The V&A's main events brochures, education programme and special exhibitions brochures do demonstrate this inclusiveness. However, the general design of the materials means that people with some disabilities will be excluded from finding the information. The V&A's house style is of very small print (and there are no alternative formats available). Design of the brochures does

not allow for any prominent message on availability of access information to be displayed.

The DDA part 3, now in force, states that information must be available in alternative formats where reasonable. It would be reasonable to conclude that a national collection could make its principal literature available in large print, and technological resources would also make it possible to provide information on disk or by e-mail.

As explained by interviewees, the positioning of the information about BSL events is unlikely to encourage deaf people to find it. In this context supplementary information on a separate document would be important.

2.7.2 Marketing through specific materials

An access brochure is available, but is poorly promoted and not displayed. A casual visiting disabled person is unlikely to know that it exists. The brochure design is clear and accessible – any update should continue in this style to ensure that the information is available as easily as possible.

Visually-impaired people on the Braille mailing list receive Braille notification of touch tours and other events for visually-impaired people. About 20 people are on this list. This successfully generates the take-up for the current programme, and is one reason why the same people tend to recur whenever there is an event. Because there is no facility for tape or large print information, the option is not available to new enquirers. People who receive Braille state that they would like information on more general opportunities, but this is not available (see later section 2.7.3).

An A4 sheet containing large print information about touch events and BSL lectures is produced within the education department. This is circulated to all contacts on the disability and disability press list. **(see section 2.7.5). It is** the basis for information disseminated by, for example, Shape London's Escort scheme and the RNIB's New Beacon. It functions adequately as an information source, but is poorly designed and would be unlikely to attract interest as a marketing tool to individuals. Because it carries information on both programmes, it also risks confusing some recipients.

The touch tour and BSL talks programme would benefit from specific flyers on the model used by the British Museum and National Gallery (see appendices) which highlight events for deaf and visually-impaired people. These not only allow people to find relevant information quickly, but demonstrate commitment to seeking out these audiences.

Deaf visitors to the V&A commented that there should be flyers or posters placed in the entrances and information areas, advertising future talks. This is an approach adopted by the National Gallery, and also provides the kind of cross-

marketing to existing deaf customers which would help develop the BSL-using events audience.

2.7.3 Cross-marketing

Existing attendees of the touch programme state that they may be interested in mainstream opportunities in the museum, but do not learn about them. Deaf visitors to the museum state that they do not learn about BSL lectures while visiting the V&A. One participant in the access programme's talks for visually-impaired people described frustration at not being able to get access to the depth of information she would like, yet was not aware of the formal education programme. This failure in cross-marketing is responsible for categorising disabled people in a way which they would not choose if they had access to full information in the format they need.

The mailing list, when revised, should be used as an opportunity to inform disabled attendees of other opportunities at the V&A. In addition, museum spaces should be used to advertise targeted programmes, so that casual visitors can pick up information about BSL lectures or touch tours which would give them better access to the knowledge and experience of the museum.

2.7.4 Networking

"It's the proactive which really changes things." Royal National Institute for the Blind

"you have to have a culture of searching out audiences" Deafworks

The V&A is geographically and culturally better placed than most of Britain's museums for developing a relationship with deaf and visually-impaired people. The access co-ordinator is well-informed on the "names" in disability and disability arts circles. Yet the V&A is woefully out of touch with disability networks, and has little or no communication with the sources of expertise known to exist. None of the principle contacts made during this research had received any contact from V&A staff asking for support or advice on the programme.

There is a desperate need for the Education Department to invest staff time in developing networks which:
- Inform the access programme
- Disseminate marketing information to potential attendees
- Feed back comment, encouragement and criticism
- Directly market specific events and programmes

Networks among disabled people feed the most influential form of advertising – word of mouth. Among disabled people, this is particularly significant because the shared experience of disability leads people to trust other disabled people's judgement.

Forming networks is not the same as developing a mailing list. It involves, for example, visiting other programmes to see what works and meet the key players in disability and interpretation circles, taking presentation material into deaf clubs and other groups, working with clubs and development workers to set up specific events aimed at particular groups and circles. It is a time-consuming task which requires enthusiasm, openness and flexibility.

2.7.5 The database

The V&A marketing database has a number of headings which focus on disability issues. These were selected under advice from the access co-ordinator and have been maintained by the administration department. Administration states that the education department is responsible for updating and amending the contacts listed here, while the access co-ordinator states that administration carries the responsibility.

The administrator does not seem to have a clear understanding of the use of disability contacts, stating, for example, that the "Braille" heading is for people interested in exhibitions about Braille (despite close questioning on the possibility of it being for people who require Braille information.) He stated that braille information was "never" sent out. It appears that the administration department does not have any close contact with, or commitment to, marketing to disabled people.

Whoever's responsibility it is, the mailing list is in such a poor state that it is meaningless. Contacts are visibly out of date, in some cases mystifyingly wrong (an Edinburgh telephone number for a BBC programme which has been based in London for eight years), the lists incomplete and apparently random in construction (few of the known disability press contacts, only one talking paper). The list has never been cleaned apart from removing details of people known to be deceased.

The inadequacy of the database affected this report, and also affects the process of marketing. The access co-ordinator mails her own Braille information using her own hand-amended list. The A4 information sheets presumably go to the contacts listed, many of whom will not receive or use the information sent. The condition of the database is probably significantly responsible for much wasted effort in setting up and attempting to generate an audience for the access programme.

2.7.6 The website

A review of websites set up by other museums was carried out as part of this evaluation. The competitor websites were selected on the grounds that it was known that all these museums (including the V&A) do have touch tours and BSL interpreted events. The website would be one place where would-be disabled attendees would expect to find information.

Websites provide an ideal form of marketing to disabled people. Apart from their universal accessibility, they have the potential selling points that:

- They can be accessed from home, without support, by many people whose mobility and independence are otherwise limited.
- They provide a fast, direct and accessible means for deaf people to access text information.
- Dedicated software means that well-designed websites can be "read" by visually-impaired people with voicing technology, or screens and font sizes enlarged to make them more easily readable.

The research was carried out during one day (although previous attempts had been made to gain information from the V&A's own website). In visual impairment terms, the research is incomplete because the researcher does not have voicing or font enlarging technology. An issue which can arise here is when text is stored as a graphic (e.g., a logo consisting of words) and cannot therefore be recognised as text by voicing technology. This can mean that the name of the site or venue, and specific information such as titles or even timetables and prices, can be lost to visually-impaired people.

The review focussed on six venues:
British Museum
Maritime Museum
V&A
Serpentine
National Gallery
Whitechapel Gallery – no website was found for the Whitechapel

The methodology followed was:
- Search for website using a search engine
- Open site
- Search for information about BSL and touch tours under four headings: Access, Events, Information, Education
- Identify whether information is given about BSL or touch tours
- In each case, identify whether the information includes:
  That they exist, date, time, subject, interpreter, contact information, other.
- Log total time taken to find information
- Comment on visual appearance and accessibility of pages (navigation etc)
- Mark out of 10 for:
  Ease of navigation, Readability, Finding what I wanted.

	BM	Maritime	V&A	Serpentine	National
Find site	1" site	1" site	listed as Victoria + Albert	2°ᵃ site1 ᵗ site needed	
Open site	3 pages	1" page	1ˢᵗ page	1ˢᵗ page	2nd page
Found under Information	✓	✓			✓
Access	✓	✓			✓
Events		✓			
Education				✓	
BSL Exists					
Date	✓	✓		✓	✓
Time	✓	✓			✓
Subject	✓	✓		✓	
Interpreter	✓			✓	
Contact		✓			
Other		✓			
Touch Exists Date	✓	✓			✓
Time					
Subject					
Contact	✓	✓			✓
Total time	7mins	5mins	9mins	5mins	4mins
Ease of Navigation	8	9	4	5	6
Readability	8	6	3	3	5
Found what I wanted	6	9	0	4	5
Total	22	24	7	12	16

Comments: General
All the comparator museums seemed to recognise the value of the website for deaf people more than for visually-impaired people. Conversely, they were less likely to give a contact route for deaf people. See appendix for print-out examples of sites.

British Museum: The most readable site, in 14-16pt blue or red on a white background. (Access information even larger). The information on BSL was out of date (Nov/Dec dates in February 2000). Comprehensive information on access of all kinds was easy to find using an access symbol button.

Maritime Museum: A very navigable and pictorial site, with a number of routes through to access information. 8pt type in black or sometimes pale blue on a white background would not always be easy to read. Some BSL information was out of date, but future events were also included. Additional information about deaf astronomers made a tempting diversion.

V&A: Although the page is headed V&A, it is listed as Victoria and Albert and took longer to find (two searches, and I had to know its full name). Very small type in blue or white on mid blue or red backgrounds is hard to read. Irritating moving graphics make it hard to decide where to click. Information headings are confusing – what is infodome? And why is program spelt the American way? Searched for Touch Tours using the site's own search engine (which did offer the option) and it came up with zero results. A print-out seems to show that text is stored as graphics – it did not print out (see appendix).

Serpentine: 8pt white print on a yellow background was too small and glaring on the screen. Could only find the site after searching for Serpentine London. Page layout has expanses of space without information, which could lead to missing information further down the page.

National Gallery: A very navigable site but Art through Words and BSL were not included in events listing. Found a press release which described both initiatives and gave contact numbers, but no programme details. Text was clear in black on white background and an adequate 9-10pt type.

2.8 Staff issues

For a disabled visitor, whether integrating into the visiting public or participating in the programme, the response of the staff to their requests, and the general friendliness and helpfulness demonstrated to them, will affect their perception of the V&A. This has a marketing effect on what they will say to other disabled people, and a repeat attendance effect if it damages their experience.

A change of culture within the museum may eventually effect a change — the head of visitor services described the culture changing from a security-based warder service to customer service.

Several of the disabled people interviewed spontaneously expressed concerns about staff attitude. Those who attended regularly, however, found everyone helpful and friendly.

Some of the concerns expressed included:
- Some staff were helpful, but in some galleries they watch you struggling with doors or trying to find things and don't offer help.
- Warders continued conversations over the heads of wheelchair users, and stood in the way of doors.
- Gallery doors were unexpectedly shut without visitors being aware this route would be closed to them.
- Visually-impaired visitors who touched things were unsympathetically "*told off*"
- "*Reception staff treated us like we were stupid and didn't believe we had an appointment. It made us very angry.*"
- Information desk volunteers "*obviously thought they were wonderful for working there, but couldn't communicate with normal people.*"

2.8.1 Training

No Disability Awareness Training (DAT) has been implemented, despite the description of some of the access training as DAT. DAT is a distinct type of training which includes discussions about vocabulary, attitude and power relationships. The training offered at the moment to new staff and volunteers offers practical orientation around the museum for wheelchair users, and an introduction to the possible needs of disabled people in the museum.

There is a strong need for DAT across the board, and this should start with a substantial programme at management/administrator level. When people who influence programmes and operations understand disability issues better, they influence the way in which services are delivered. DAT for warders and volunteers would be a more direct need once the museum's culture has been influenced.

3 Comparators

As part of the research activity, comparator organisations were identified based on those most frequently cited by interviewees. These were organisations already running programmes which had generated interest among deaf and visually-impaired people. In some cases, they illustrated new or innovative approaches. In others, they demonstrated routes to developing an audience.

The case studies come from direct interview, or are precise accounts from the report on **Opening Up!...,** a conference hosted in 1999 by Deafworks on access for deaf people to arts, cultural and tourism venues. The report on this conference is available from Deafworks priced £15.

3.1 National Maritime Museum

The Maritime Museum has developed a popular programme for deaf people which includes:
- Modifying the space at the Royal Observatory Planetarium to suit sign interpretation for deaf visitors (bringing their own interpreters).
- The chance to work with teachers to provide custom made sessions developed from standard programmes.
- A programme of adult talks and lectures with sound enhancement and BSL interpreters. *"These are now nearly all fully booked, but this was not the case when we started 6 years ago. We have learned by evaluation what are the most required topics, and have steadily built up our audiences. It is important not to be put off if first interpreted events are not well attended."*
- The signed events become part of days out for deaf people – a sort of informal club. Provision can sometimes be made for people to sit and chat.
- Some signed events are especially designed for deaf families. "Feedback information told us these would be popular."
- The museum has a Deaf Astronomers Day as part of Science, Engineering and Technology week.
- A Deaf Astronomers Club, and a drama based on the life of Deaf astronomer John Goodricke, have also been built into the programme.

The Maritime Museum markets its programme through a separate leaflet Events for Deaf People. Partnerships with Shape and Deafworks have been very useful in general marketing including leaflet distribution.

Interpretation Officer Jane Dewey comments:
"Things do happen, albeit very slowly since cultural and attitude changes are involved. It is necessary to plan for the long term because of this — say five years in advance. When I look back over my time I see enormous advances. Many users have expressed their appreciation of this – though others point out what is still missing!"

3.2 National Gallery

The National Gallery runs a programme for deaf and visually-impaired visitors.

On the first Saturday of each month there is a sign interpreted talk programmed to include a range from introductory talks, current exhibitions and art history. One interpreter has been used to date, but it is now intended to use more than one following evaluation with attendees – different interpreters work in different ways and variety is appreciated.

A talk about deaf artist Avercamp was programmed during deaf awareness week, and was well attended. Attendance ranges from 12-15, up to 35-40 "if the word Impressionism is in the title." The talks take different formats, including themed guided tours, in exhibition talks and slide lectures.

The talks are marketed using a dedicated leaflet, information on the internet and public noticeboards around the gallery. A mailing list of about 100 individuals and organisations receive the leaflet, which is also available on the information desk.

Education officer Marion Carlisle comments:
"The programme is not overly ambitious, and it has a pattern so that we can establish ourselves. It shows that we take it seriously — stopping and starting isn't a good idea. We also feel we should keep it simple."

Art Through Words, the programme for visually-impaired visitors, takes place on the last Saturday of every month. The programme is based on the fact that there is no opportunity for touch at the National Gallery, so Marcus Weisen, the RNIB leisure and arts officer, advised working to the strength of the collection.

The session uses colour A3 reproductions which allow people with some sight to get close to the work. Audio description is based on advice from the RNIB and some other people who work in this field. The session is informal and people ask questions. Context on the artist, the way the picture was painted and the reason that is in the collection is provided. The group also goes into the gallery to see the picture in situ and feel the Gallery atmosphere.

The first session attracted three people, and up to 18 now attend each month. There is a core group of about 30 attendees. People used to visit with their own escorts but having become familiar with the format they now arrive independently. Familiarity is established by using the same entrance and space. An additional staff member is on hand to pass things round and be an extra pair of hands.

Speaking about audio-description, Marion said: " *There are no hard and fast rules – each picture is looked at afresh. We have a team of about five freelances who are paid to run the sessions, and we had initial guidance from the RNIB on how to give a sense of the picture."*

3.3 Whitechapel Gallery

The Whitechapel's programme of talks for deaf visitors is quoted as a model by a number of deaf people. Two talks from the programme supporting each exhibition are interpreted into BSL – the two are chosen to be quite different, for example contrasting artists, or a writer/curator and an artist (giving theoretical and practical views). The timing is generally that one is at the beginning of a new exhibition and one half way through.

The talk is followed by a "D'Art" meeting, usually attended by about 10 deaf people from a core attendance of 15. At this the visitors have the chance to discuss the talk and the exhibition, sometimes to ask further questions of the presenter. Each talk is evaluated using a short questionnaire which poses questions on the content and the interpretation.

Education co-ordinator Kate Ballard says: *"People come from the other side of London because of what we're offering. They like the shows, the atmosphere and the staff. The experience is high quality, so they come back. We have a lot of personal contact and it's a chance to get feedback about the talk, the programme and what they want from it."*

The Whitechapel has produced a video for other museum educators and deaf people exploring ways of interpreting visual art which is available at £12.99 (order form appended).

The gallery also runs access workshops for people with other disabilities. These are run by two artists (one visually impaired) and include a morning tour and discussion, with some touch, followed by an afternoon practical workshop.

3.4 British Museum

The British Museum began to offer BSL interpreted "Eye Openers" following informal evaluation which showed that there was no provision for deaf people. Consulting with Deafworks, they decided to run one session a month using a sound enhancement system as well as BSL. Different times, days, interpreters and subjects were chosen for variety. Laraine Callow acted as "Deaf Host", greeting people and gathering feedback.

The pilot sessions were evaluated by Deafworks, office staff, guides and interpreters. Changes were made based on evaluation comments about the guide, interpreter, content, timing and publicity.

The pilot project fed a regular programme which still continues. The British Museum developed more knowledge about marketing, including using Teletext adverts, disability magazine listings, specialist mailing lists and collaboration with other organisations.

3.5 Themes from comparators

The experience of other museums and galleries demonstrates the following:

- Initiatives can succeed, and larger audiences can be developed.
- Varied marketing routes are needed
- Informality works, and social time / discussion is popular
- Programmes need a champion who is enthusiastic and energetic, and willing to learn.
- The culture of openness previously mentioned is evident in each successful project
- Evaluation should feed changes to the programme
- The audience develops slowly
- Successful projects play to the strengths of the collection

4 Evaluation summary

4.1 Strengths and weaknesses

The primary strength which the V&A has was mentioned by almost all disabled interviewees. It lies in the quality and variety of the collection, and the knowledgeability of the staff. Interviewees mentioned:
- The "fantastic" collections
- The beautiful building
- The atmosphere of the galleries
- The high standard and detail of information given
- The knowledgeability of everyone concerned.

The access programme harnesses these strengths best in the talks for visually-impaired people, where the quality and variety are used to the advantage of a regular group of attendees.

The V&A's weakness is in the focus of how it approaches the Access Programme. By remaining isolated from the communities it seeks to serve, the V&A has not been able to gauge the type of provision which would be welcomed and used by more people with visual impairments, and by deaf people. The weaknesses lie in:
- The lack of dialogue and "openness" to changing disability culture
- Poor marketing networks and materials
- Inhibited approaches to programming, lack of imagination.
- Inertia in addressing obvious deficiencies

This has impacted most on the numbers of attendees for BSL talks, which are negligible, but it will in the future prove a deciding factor in the competition for audiences which now characterises the arts industry in general.

The Museum provides adequate opportunities for integration of disabled visitors, but fails to market these to the extent that the opportunity could be widely taken up. Integration into activities is mixed, with some activities providing their own barriers, and others barred by physical factors which will need to be addressed before the 2004 implementation of the DDA part 4.

4.2 Market position

The Access Programme was developed at a time when provision for people with sensory impairments was unusual and easily marketed, attracting attention by its very existence. During its lifespan it has failed to reinvent itself, while other museums have entered the market later, but with different approaches.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Background to Recommendations: Deciding on a Position

The V&A now finds itself with a programme which is viewed as rather staid and pedestrian, in a market full of ideas and approaches. Legislation has developed in such a way that the programme as now provided may even be regarded as inadequate to meet the requirements of law.

Because of the quality of the material the V&A has to work with, the change of customer culture among disabled people and the improved access to education and the arts, there is an opportunity to work with disabled people to develop an innovative programme which matches the quality of the V&A's formal education programme, and the imagination of its gallery events.

5.2 Tackle Marketing Issues

5.2.1 Marketing Materials

The heading in each case should be unambiguous. The word deaf should be contained in the heading (e.g. Talks for deaf visitors) as BSL users respond to this as an identity. In the case of visually-impaired visitors, this requires further consultation. It may be that a phrase such as "Talks with touch and description" are more effective than "talks for visually-impaired visitors". Leaflets should then be distributed by post and networks (see below) and placed in prominent locations on information desks.

In-gallery posters – these could use the same format as the leaflets, but should be large and prominently placed (e.g., cafe, reception area, cloakroom). Welcome and instruction posters should be placed at the two reception areas on the night of any BSL talk.

5.2.2 The website

The ongoing design process should be used to get access information into the website prominently and by an easily navigable route. Examples from comparator websites cited in this report should be studied for precedents. Help is also available from other technological advisory sources (see appendix 7). All information on the access programme should be accompanied by a list of contact details to gain further information. This should include phone, fax and e-mail addresses.

5.2.3 Press materials

Although the re-designed flyer could be used as press information, more detailed information might gain better coverage using a revised and expanded mailing list (see below). Material sent to the disability press could take the form of a mini-release with more of a "sales" message to encourage either editorial or listings coverage. For example:

"The V&A's spring programme of talks for visually-impaired people takes a hands-on look at the beauty of Art Deco with two talks designed to give access to the museum's prestigious exhibition."

5.2.4 Revise the database

The database needs intensive attention, including:
- Cleaning the list to remove out of date, un-contactable or incorrect details.
- Expanding the list to include all known disability press contacts including: a main talking newspaper contact (national) and local contacts teletext, Read Hear, television and radio contacts (local) all disability press including DAIL, Deaf Arts UK, Disability Now, New Beacon, Newsflash, ADKC newsletter and others
- Creating a new database section for generic disability contacts including outreach workers, local disability action groups and organisations such as Shape with networking potential.
- Collating the braille users section of the database with the visually-impaired category
- Creating a system for identifying people requesting large print, tape, braille or e-mail information

A mailing list request form should be created which states what information formats are available, and gives people the chance to sign up to the database should they wish to receive information. This should be distributed as an insert into the access leaflet, and at all access programme events.

5.2.4 Begin the networking process

The principle organisations mentioned in this report and in the appendices have all expressed interest in better dialogue and networking with the V&A. In several cases, they stressed that simply receiving information in the post would not be enough to demonstrate commitment and interest. An education officer with responsibility for developing the programme should fix a programme of visits which would allow them to explore networking links, ways of opening dialogue and ideas for developing the programme.

5.2.5 Revise the taped tour

The "tour in a bag" introductory tape should be revised to include more gallery description and a more general sense of the content of collections. A further tape could be considered **(see below 5.4.11)**

5.3 Review the programme content

5.3.1 Networking

The networking process described above could begin the process of establishing what subjects, formats and styles would be most likely to attract wider audiences to programmed events.

5.3.2 Timetabling

Other examples suggest that, for deaf audiences, regularity and a programme timed out of working hours are most likely to help develop audiences. Weekends and Wednesday evenings should be considered as opportunities to make a fixed programme with regular, dependable dates for BSL talks.

For touch tours and audio description, daytimes suit many visually-impaired people better, but weekends are more likely to attract younger people who may be working or studying.

5.3.3 Content

In consultation with the network contacts established, a programme of content should be devised which works with the museum and its programme, but which approaches the subjects likely to be of interest to the target audience. This will include the kind of subjects now delivered, but may, for example, harness the interest of the general public in popular topics (c.f. National Gallery's experience with talks on Impressionism) or focus on angles of interest to the deaf community **(see section 2.3.12 above for Deaf Arts, and under innovation below).**

A developed programme should not be afraid of presenting information at a detailed level on specific makers or movements, but this would need to be carefully marketed and built on improved attendance. General introductions might be better suited to attracting a new audience, again, if carefully marketed and targeted at — for example — school or student groups (see appendix).

5.3.4 Interpreters

There is a shortage of interpreters, but there are specialists in visual arts. In consultation with deaf consultants and by reviewing other sessions (see below) it should be possible to identify a core group of interpreters who could be rotated. Managing an anti-clash diary (see below) should ensure that interpreters can be available for specific sessions.

Some listening is needed to understand the nuances of interpretation — who is popular in which contexts, which interpreters enjoy discussion, how to use

interpreters in pairs and how to identify BSL users who still need interpretation through lack of fluency.

A relationship can be built between a regular group of attendees and an audience (c.f. Whitechapel) or the variety of different styles can enliven a programme (c.f. National Gallery). What suits the V&A needs to be worked on over time. It should never be the case that an interpreter is booked because they are the only person available. By making an interpreter part of the development process, a source of information and a degree of loyalty are built in to the programme.

5.3.5 Learn from other initiatives

Well-established programmes at other galleries all generate good audiences and offer new ideas for development. A staff member working on the development of an improved access programme should timetable a programme of visiting other initiatives, talking to audiences, interpreters and other education workers. There appear to be no secrets or competitive concerns, and other education workers value the opportunity to share good practice.

5.3.6 Take advice

Beyond the V&A, the access programme has developed a reputation for being unwilling to take advice. There are sources of expertise – some free and some at consultancy rates – which offer a wealth of simple, practical ideas and information on good practice. The V&A must make staff time for a development worker to consult and to understand what these expert witnesses have to offer.

The access worker should also view advice from disabled people in the target markets as consultancy time. Areas where a professional relationship could inform the programme are in developing the deaf audience through networks, and formalising a set of guidelines for selecting touch objects.

5.3.7 Attend training

The access programme co-ordinator identified shortage of good training sources as a problem at the level of managing the programme. It is important that whoever manages the access development work attends relevant training offered by organisations who are both arts-orientated and immersed in disability culture.
- Important areas for training would be:
- Disability Awareness Training
- Marketing to deaf audiences
- The DDA part 3 (Goods and services)

Staff involved in delivering access programme activities and workshops would also benefit from Disability Awareness training. A core group of information staff/volunteers and escorts should receive deaf awareness training. Escorts involved in the visual-impairment programme should receive guidance on audio-description, and curatorial staff guidelines on selection of items for touch (the latter could be provided in paper form).

Relevant training opportunities are provided by Deafworks, Artsline, Shape London and other organisations including the RNIB and RNID.

5.3.8 Briefing sheet for volunteers

An attitude briefing sheet should be provided for volunteers which reminds them of the customer service aspects of meeting needs, and briefs them on access facilities, taped tours and proactive approaches to giving information.

5.4 Innovation

The ideas in this section are all suggested against the background of the collections' strengths — the quality and variety of the collections, the knowledgeability of the curators and staff, the quality of the way that it is imparted. These aspects were repeatedly stressed by interviewees and in harnessing the existing perception the V&A could develop an access programme with a strong reputation for quality of interpretation.

5.4.1 Deaf/disability culture

Research in deaf and disability arts circles is now considering the importance of the representation of disabled/deaf people in museum and gallery collections. Works by, representations of and items used by disabled people all form part of a new cultural awareness which is feeding a sense of identity and empowerment among politicised disabled people.

Although this identity is by no means universal, particularly among disabled people who become disabled later in life, it does form part of the debate in disability arts. The V&A collection, from its roots in craft and manufacture, will inevitably contain elements of deaf and disability culture. An advantage could be made of this for the interest, particularly, of the Deaf community. In consultation with deaf and disabled people, the following ideas could be explored:

- Deaf makers — an opportunity to look at works by deaf artists and craftsmen through a series of talks and handling sessions targeted at BSL users.
- From decorative to functional — an examination of how mobility aids moved from being decorative examples of craftsmanship, with their own fashion value, to functional "badges of impairment". Looking at sticks and canes, invalid/wheelchairs and other personal items.
- Touching craftsmen — handling sessions based on the tools, techniques and products of blind craftsmen from "asylums" and institutions.
- The mythology of disability — the stories of mythological figures whose impairments form part of their characterisation. (e.g. Taoist immortal Li Tieguai, Norse poet Baldur.)

While it would not be expected that such tours/talks would form the major part of the programme, creating and marketing them would offer access to items of cultural significance, and offer the V&A an opportunity for demonstrating their openness to allowing the collection to be used as a resource for cultural research.

5.4.4 An access development worker

Many of the ideas put forward by staff and other interviewees rest on the availability of a staff member with time to invest in developing and improving the access programme. A worker should be appointed or designated whose principle activity is to develop this audience and ways of reaching it, using this report as a starting point.

Evidence elsewhere indicates that the dynamism, openness, flexibility and commitment of the individual involved drives the programme. Having a single named point of contact also helps to develop the audience. Having more than part-time responsibility allows the worker to be on top of administration and maintenance, to develop new contacts and knowledge, and to be creative in programme planning. The current staff position only allows for reactive and maintenance level of activity.

5.4.5 Work with disabled people

All successful programmes rely on continual interaction with the disabled people they serve. In some cases, consultants help to drive the process (e.g. British Museum's Deaf Host). In others, evaluation from participants feeds change, or networking with other organisations helps to develop ideas.

By involving disabled people in planning, in change and in establishing principles the programme is more likely to meet the needs of its audience. By continuing the dialogue, it will change as society changes and recognise new developments and attitudes.

5.4.6 Throw out old ideas

Controversially, some interviewees recommended "chucking out" the initiatives which had already become failures (particularly the BSL programme). This was on the basis that any continuation, however changed for the better, would be tarnished by association with the previous programme.

To some extent, this could be achieved by a re-launch — perhaps after establishing a new timetable or format, or after considering some of the cultural issues described above. The marketing task is certainly likely to be harder for a product which is already perceived to be out there, and to be inadequate for its audience needs.

5.4.7 Add a social dimension

Several deaf interviewees and case studies demonstrated the importance of social time as part of BSL activities. In Deaf culture, the opportunity to get together and

talk is one of the chief attributes of a cultural or social event. By using the relaxed formula of late-night opening, or by providing a dedicated space and time for
discussion after a talk, the V&A could meet this need and improve the quality of an event with BSL interpretation.

5.4.8 Form a club

The core group currently attending talks for visually-impaired visitors all expressed their satisfaction with the friendliness, small size and regular attendance of the events. To some extent, having also been involved in workshop activities, this group has already become a club. It is possible that formalising this and allowing the new programme to develop at a tangent would be a way to keep the existing audience while developing new opportunities for other attendees.

A club would meet regularly — say six times a year — and would have input into their programme. They might form a structure of working round the museum one gallery or exhibition at a time, or they might revisit a particular collection in more depth. There would be no need for introductory events, which could be offered in a new format as part of a separate programme. Club members might also be encouraged to visit between sessions — using the escort scheme or participating in other activities where their evident familiarity with the museum and staff would have a less alienating effect on other attendees.

5.4.9 Develop the young audience

Curators, staff and interviewees expressed concern at the lack of young people participating in activities on the access programme. A new, younger audience provides the lifeline which protects the programme against one of its weaknesses — that its audience is ageing and therefore diminishing for various reasons. A younger audience has also grown up in a different political context, and feels differently about impairment and the ways in which services are provided. As they become adults, these people will have different expectations, but could shape the success of the V&A's future access programme.

It was also pointed out that deaf, disabled and visually-impaired people are more likely now to have access to the arts through education. Mainstream arts and crafts courses are more accessible, and some colleges are developing support units alongside arts expertise. One interviewee described deaf students as being virtually "pushed" into the visual arts. All this new generation should have a perception of the V&A as a treasure house of ideas and techniques which they could use as a resource.

Dialogue with students and tutors would create opportunities for activity. Appendix 5 gives a sample of ideas for contacts in this area.

5.4.10 Participating in gallery events

The support items presented as part of the gallery events programme have potential for offering inclusion, particularly to disabled children. One idea would be to create a back-pack, or cart activities (or both) with particular suitability for visually-impaired children, for children with learning disabilities or for children with mobility impairments.

There are several play-based manufacturers with products targeted at children "with special needs" who may carry items which offer ideas. The RNIB resource centre at Great Portland street also carries play products for visually-impaired children which could be adapted for use.

5.4.11 Use of tape as a marketing tool

In addition to taped gallery guides, it would be appropriate to create a "review" tape to be sent out to disabled and visually-impaired people before their visit. A model of this is provided by Manchester Museums' Give It A Go tape (available from Arts About Manchester) which reviews two galleries in the words of disabled visitors. This allows an informative and critical view, which reviewers have said inspires disabled people to want to attend.

5.5 Co-operation
5.5.1 Anti-clash diary

This option is already being explored by some museums, and as an opportunity it is greeted with enthusiasm by most. It involves access programme co-ordinators notifying each other of planned talk dates so that BSL interpreted talks or audio/touch events do not compete for a limited market. Ideally, the discussion should happen at planning stage, rather than programme managers simply passing each other information when the programme is set. It could also mitigate the problems of finding a suitable interpreter, helping interpreters to programme work for more than one gallery.

5.5.2 Co-promotion (STAG)

This proposal came from an interviewee who based it on the model of SPIT (Signed Performance in Theatre). STAG (Signed Talks in Galleries) would be a centrally-produced directory of talks marketed to deaf people. All partners would notify their planned programme, and would distribute quarterly copies of the guide to their deaf contacts.

Problems mentioned in discussion included the need for a central co-ordinator and funding for this, and the difficulties experienced by SPIT in persuading companies/venues to notify their events in time. The Museums and Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA) may be interested in discussing ways of moving this proposal forward.

5.5.3 Shape escort scheme

The Shape escort scheme is a refined version of the Volunteer Escort scheme, including better training for volunteers and a distinct definition of roles and responsibilities (see appendix 6). The V&A may benefit from studying the model, but also from encouraging its take-up by would-be V&A visitors. This is because the centralised scheme has a wider cross-section of volunteers who might address the companionship needs of a different audience. It may also bring in visitors who do not currently use museums. A discussion with Shape may yield ideas on how to better promote the V&A through the escort scheme (perhaps using a flyer or insert in their handbook).

Appendix one: disability — an overview

Increasing diversity in needs, views and political affiliation characterises the world of disability entering the third millennium. Disabled people in the UK have received first indications of their rights through the implementation of the DDA (1995) and are becoming increasingly likely to exercise choice. At the same time, the disabled population is becoming more numerous — partly due to demographic trends such as ageing, and partly because a more sympathetic culture encourages self-definition as disabled, and the ability to assert needs.

The DDA (1995), when fully implemented (2004), will improve substantial areas of living for disabled people, including employment rights, rights to services and physical access to buildings. Transport and education are two areas where provision is yet to be formalised. In addition, the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission will ensure that advice is available on disability issues, and that flagrant disregard of the law can be pursued without the responsibility for prosecution remaining solely with the individual disabled person.

Politically, disabled people in general have become more aware of the concept of "rights" because of political lobbying leading up to and following the current legislation. Not all disabled people actively pursue rights, or believe that they are necessary — activists are in the minority. However, the concept that disabled people can demand that something they need should be done in a particular way, and not be accepted under any circumstances, has begun to enter the general consciousness.

Disabled living does not conform to a specific pattern, although many disabled people share concerns and needs around transport, finance, social needs, employment and education. Disabled people exist at all levels of society and in all social and domestic situations, at all ages and in every other racial or cultural minority.

For many disabled people, the support offered by Social Services departments structures their lives around the need for domiciliary care including cleaning, cooking and personal assistance. In addition, residential care, respite care (to support carers), day centres and vocational training — sometimes leading to employment — are all provided by statutory services.

Other disabled people have little or no contact with these services and support their needs through families providing exclusive care, or by managing and financing their own needs. In these cases support such as that provided by the Employment Service through PACT, or schemes such as subsidised transport, vehicle finance (Motability) and the rail network's passenger assistance scheme provide only occasional contact with "special" services for disabled people.

The passivity of the role in which disabled people traditionally received services is being questioned both by service providers and by disabled people themselves. While change depends on personalities – and many on both sides are slow to embrace change – it is becoming more understood that people in the most dependent situations should still have the ability to choose – what they wear, how their hair is cut, whether to work and where to live.

The latest accepted figure for disabled people stands at 8.6 million (see below) but other impairment specific statistics demonstrate that the incidence of some kind of impairment is far wider than is reflected in the figures.

Disabled people now define disability according to the **social model** (which locates the difficulty in the environment and society which "disables" an individual) rather than through the **medical model** (which places responsibility for disability on the symptoms, abilities or condition of the individual).

In evaluating needs, however, it is still broadly acceptable to look at impairment groups demonstrating different needs including:

Mobility impairment – restricting ability to walk, climb stairs, to stand for long periods, to queue or to remain in one position without pain.
Visual impairment – affecting some or all of the vision and requiring better facilities for communication, sign-posting, orientation and safety standards.
Hearing impairment – from slight hearing loss to profound deafness and needing better communication technology, staff awareness and information formats.
Learning disability – including the need for information in alternative formats, staff awareness and people-friendly policies.
Mental Health issues – affecting a variety of living activities and requiring flexible policies, sympathetic building design and staff awareness.
Hidden disabilities – which may include any of the needs above but which may also involve acute pain, incontinence, fatigue, loss of concentration or co-ordination.

Statistics are confused by the overlap between impairments (people may have more than one disability) and by the different bases that disability organisations use for calculation.

Finance

Although there is no direct link between disability and economic status, there is a tendency for disabled people to be in lower income brackets due to the lower than average opportunities for employment among disabled people. Disabled

people are significantly more likely to be unemployed than other people in similar age brackets.

Disabled people in any income bracket have higher than average expenses to maintain their independence. This can be exacerbated for earners when support measures are means tested. Disabled people have disproportionately high expenses on, for example, transport, accommodation, domestic assistance and support at work.

Benefit provision offers a means of support for many people, through benefits ranging from Disability Living Allowance to allowances targeted at carers in domestic situations. Some benefits bring their own trap, in that to win them disabled people have to prove their incapacity for work. This means that activity which tends to demonstrate "capacity" for work, whether this is voluntary, low paid or in an educational context, can result in the loss of benefits.

Because of the inflexibility of this situation, disabled people who might otherwise be able to undertake a few hours of work, or unpaid volunteering, might decide not to do so.

Concessions offered to disabled people should be offered to the disabled person, not to the carer, as the concession otherwise tends to discriminate against independent disabled people without carers, who might themselves be on a low income.

National statistics

National statistics on disability are substantially based on the 1991 census survey (OPCS), which used the question "Does the person have a long-term illness, health problem or handicap which limits his/her daily activities or the work he/she can do?" Statistical data analysed nationally by charities representing different impairment groups may use different bases which are not directly comparable. A variable is also introduced by the imprecise definition of "limiting daily activities", which may have caused some disabled people to respond in the negative to the census question.

Disabled people

- **Disabled people in Great Britain — 8.6million (14.7%) (**

Information supplied by RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation).

(The OPCS 1991 Census placed the percentage figure as 12% of the population, or 6.5 million disabled people.)

- **Deaf and hearing impaired people in the UK (RNID information office)**

Total UK adult population with any hearing impairment 8,640,000 (18.5%) Total UK adult population with mild hearing impairment 4, 645,000 (10%)
Total UK adult population with moderate hearing impairment 3,322,000 (7.1%)
Total UK adult population with severe hearing impairment 532,000 (1.1%)
Total UK adult population with profound hearing loss 141,000 (0.3%) British Sign Language users in the UK 50,000, of whom 38,000 are under 60 years old.

- **People with learning disabilities**

Total adults/children in the UK with learning disabilities 1.2million (2%) (Mencap information office)
Severe or profoundly learning disabled people 200,000 (4 in every 1000)
More male than female. One quarter of the total are children under 16. Children born with some level of learning disability, one in every 20. Children born with severe learning disabilities, six in every 1000 births.

- **Blind and Visually-impaired people**

RNIB calculated prevalence rates suggest that **1,029,570 (1.76%) people in the UK are blind or partially sighted.** Registered blind and partially sighted people total 315,782. (Derived from research for *Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain: The RNIB Survey* (1991))

- **Mental Health System Survivors**

National figures for Mental Health system survivors, or those suffering mental health problems, vary according to source. The MIND information line supplied the following information:
People experiencing mental health problems at any one time – one in seven (14%) (OPCS) or one in four (25%) Audit Commission.

- **People over the age of 65**

Help the Aged gives the figure 9 million people over the age of 65, or 15.7% of the population (OPCS Census Survey 1991).

Appendix two: contributors to research

T = by telephone
P = in person
F = by fax

Visually-impaired participants

Lyn Cox (occasional attendee) T
Mary Connelly (regular attendee) T
Nagla Faraeh (non attendee) P
Barry Ginley (disability consultant, advisory group member, non attendee) T
Sunethra Goonewardene (regular attendee) T
Lisa Keys (non attendee) P
Ian McDonald (RNIB outreach team) P
Fiona De Souza (non attendee) P
Gioya Steinke (regular attendee, former advisory group member) T
Michelle Steer (RNIB outreach co-ordinator) P
Nada Saade (non attendee) P
Andrew Welsh (new attendee) T

Hearing impairment issues

Damien Robinson (ACE) P
John Wilson (Shape Deaf Arts Forum) P
Nicholas Callow, Laraine Callow (Deafworks) P
Reita Bansal (former group leader) F

Organisations, advisors and case studies

Stephen Webber (Art Through Touch) T
Caroline Ayling-Hall (consultant Guide Dogs for the Blind) T
Marcus Weisen (RNIB leisure services officer) T
Marion Carlisle (National Gallery education co-ordinator) P
Sue Picton (consultant)
Guy Purdey (Chair, MAGDA)
Rebecca Tolputt (Westminster Adult Education Service) P
Kate Ballard (Whitechapel Gallery education co-ordinator) P
Yasmin Laibi (education attainder) T

V&A staff

Charlotte Cotton (Curator – photography) P

Harriet Connides (Information Desk Manager) P
Anne Eatwell (Curator– Metalwork) P
Rupert Faulkner (Curator— Far Eastern collection) P
Patrick Hevey (Administration) P
Nigel Kirkup (Head of visitor services) P
Rebecca Merry (Formal Education Administrator) P
Andrew Price (Cleaning staff) P
Andrew Spira (Curator—metalwork) P
Anna Salaman (Family drop-in programme) P
Imogen Stewart (Access programme co-ordinator) P
Liz Lynch (Volunteer escort) P
Judy Leheny (Volunteer escort) P
Diana Copisarow (Volunteer escort) P
Dale Thomas (Volunteer escort) P
June Cole (Volunteer escort) P
Jennifer Robinson (Volunteer escort) P

Appendix three: further reading and viewing

Arts About Manchester
Give It A Go! (taped guide to Manchester museums)

Arts Council of England
Guidelines for Marketing to Disabled Audiences (1995). Annie Delin and Elspeth Morrison

Arts Council of England/Employers' Forum on Disability
The Disability Communication Guide (1999)

DeafWorks
Opening Up!... Access for deaf and hard of hearing people to arts, cultural and tourism venues (1999)

Employers' Forum on Disability
Welcoming Disabled Customers

Minister for Disabled People
DL 60 — **The Disability Discrimination Act, Definition of Disability** (1996)
DL 80 — **The Disability Discrimination Act, Access to Goods, Facilities and Services** (1996)

Museums and Galleries Disability Association (MAGDA)
Barrier Free, issues one, two and three (to winter 1999)

Paul Redfern
Paintings by Deaf and Deafened Artists (1995) (Order through Forest Bookshop Tel 01594 833858)

RNIB Leisure Services
Making Museums Accessible (Sept 1995)
Guidelines for describing museum objects and paintings to blind and partially sighted people (August 1994)

Shape London
Deaf Arts UK

Whitechapel Gallery
Picture This! A video considering the use and development of British Sign Language in galleries and museums.

Appendix four: selected websites

The government's disability website
http://www.disability.gov.uk or e-mail ddahelp@stra.sitel.co.uk

Universal design (accessible websites) Designing Accessible Programs for Museums
http://nadc.ucla.edu/DesigningAccessiblePrograms.htm

Centre for Applied Special Technology
http://www.cast.org

W3C, Web Accessibility Initiative
http://www.w3org/WAI/References/

British Computer Society Disability group
www.abilitynet.co.uk

Art Through Touch
http://members.aol.com/ATTouch

British Council of Disabled People (BCODP)
e-mail jenny@bcodp.demon.co.uk

British Deaf Association
www.bda.org.uk

DEAF-UK
(Deaf discussion group)
email deaf-uk@cxegroups.com

Appendix five: contact opportunities

The contacts suggested below are a selection only, based on contacts made during research. The development of a network requires further research.

Deaf contacts

Deafworks
Consultancy and training on hearing impairment in the arts
59 Banner Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1Y 8PX
Tel 020 7689-0033 Fax 020 7689 1049

Forest Bookshop
Books, videos and CD-ROM's about deafness and deaf issues
The Forest Bookshop, 8 St John Street, Coleford, Glos GL16 8AR
Tel 01594 833858 Fax 01594 833446
Website www.ForestBooks.com

British Deaf History Society
To encourage the study of and foster interest in Deaf history
49 Whitton Close, Doncaster, South Yorks DN4 7RB
e-mail chris@onic.demon.co.uk
website www.ionic.demon.co.uk/index.htm

RNID
19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Tel 020 7296 8000 Fax 020 7296 8199

British Deaf Association
Produces British Deaf News
1-3 Worship Street, London EC2 2AB
Tel 020 7588 3520 Fax 020 7588 3527

Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP)
Holds a register of sign language interpreters and assesses BSL training
Durham University, Science Site Block 4, Stockton Road, Durham DH1 3UZ
Tel 0191 383 1155 (voice and minicom)   Fax 0191 383 7914

Visual impairment

Art Through Touch
Art and sculpture workshops and activities for blind and partially sighted adults and children
41 Westbury Court, Nightingale Lane, London SW4 9AB
Tel 020 8673 5389

RNIB
Advice on touch, audio description etc
Marcus Weisen (Leisure Services (Arts) officer)
224 Great Portland Street, London WIN 6AA
Tel 020 7388 1266

RNIB Garrow House Outreach Service
Contacts with visually-impaired people in the community, and residential service
Michelle Coultharde Steer (Outreach co-ordinator)

RNIB Outreach service
190 Kensal Road, North Kensington, London W10 5BT
Tel 020 8964 1594 Fax 020 8960 3593

General disability contacts

Shape London
Ticket and escort scheme, deaf arts focus group and Deaf Arts UK magazine
LVS Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA
Tel 020 7700 0100 Fax 020 7700 8143
Deaf arts contact John Wilson

Gallery Education officers

Whitechapel Gallery
Kate Ballard
Whitechapel Gallery, Whitechapel High Street, London El 7QX
Tel 020 7522 7888 Fax 020 7377 1685

National Gallery
Marion Carlisle
National Gallery
Tel 020 7747 2894

Possible education contacts
(provided verbally by interviewees, not checked)

Where to contact deaf/arts students
London College of Print Graphics department
Camberwell School of Art (trying to set up a deaf students group. Speak to John Wilson at Shape)
City Lit Centre for Deaf People Tel 020 7405 5118
Oak Lodge 6th Form College, Heathview London N2 OQY Tel 020 8444 6711
Blanche Neville unit (within Fortismere School), Tetherdown, N101NE (deaf unit within a school with strong reputation in the arts).
St Paul's School, Shelmerdine Close, London E3 4AN (has a hearing impaired unit and is trying for specialist art school status)

Where to contact visually-impaired students
Lyndon Lodge School
Sevenoaks RNIB school
Wood Lane School
St Martins College
Advice from Seema Dass, RNIB students advisor Tel 020 7391 2278

Appendix six: Background materials

Publicity materials

Art through Touch British Museum BSL talks
Deafworks
National Gallery audio description and BSL talks
RNIB leisure bulletin
RNIB exhibition
Shape London Volunteer scheme (and Volunteer Information Pack)
Shape Deaf Arts
Whitechapel Gallery video Picture This!

Appendix seven: comparator websites

Print-outs from sampled websites

British Museum
National Gallery
National Maritime Museum
V&A