Case Study

Museum of Hartlepool

Access for All Cohort 2025-26

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Project Curator at the **Museum of Hartlepool** **Freya Purcell** decided to join the Access for All Cohort to strengthen her understanding of accessibility and how to make the museum more accessible and engaging for all visitors.

She said, 'Being part of the cohort and accessing mentoring was a fantastic opportunity from Museum Development North. One of the most impactful parts was having the time and space to learn with other museum professionals. Knowing that others were going through the same problems and working in similar situations was more than just encouraging. It helped being able to see the practical solutions that I could deliver in my own workplace, like a front of house **access guide** to our exhibition 'Lines of Legitimacy'.'

Freya also worked with a disabled artist and sculptor to create **sensory points of access** to the exhibition, such as lavender perfume.

Freya said, 'As a result of working with the cohort and seeing solutions that other museum's had found, we reached out to our local creators hub at our library to develop tactile 3D models of the collection that could add to the exhibition within a limited budget.'

What was the Access Cohort?

The cohort brought together delegates from **14** museums across the North of England who shared the aim of improving their offer for disabled visitors. The programme included a range of in-person and online events, combining sessions led by access consultants with lived experience, a range of expert guest speakers and case studies from museums who are leading the way in access and inclusion in the region. A new group of museums are currently taking part in 2026-27.

A 3D printed replica of a perfume bottle

Who benefitted from the activity?

Visitors benefitted from the different forms of access implemented in the exhibition from the sensory elements, to the descriptions of the exhibition provided by the artist that could be accessed digitally.

Freya said, 'One of the highlights of my year was receiving feedback from a visitor after the exhibition who described the access as "top bananas". Not only was this hugely encouraging, but it gave us an idea of what really worked and what to focus on next time. Some of the most valued things were some of the cheapest interventions for example providing the text online'.

The team also gained confidence, 'As curators we benefitted by improving our knowledge about how people experienced the museum and the challenges they might face as well as the ways to discuss it. Knowing how to describe these issues gave staff the confidence to feedback to designers to improve the accessibility of planned displays.'

What's next?

- Freya is excited to implement the **visual description training** in an upcoming exhibition and to use more tactile objects to enhance the visitor experience
- The team is looking at how to improve access information **digitally and on-site**
- The museum is going to use the information gained as part of the cohort in the next stages of its redevelopment, makin sure that **access is embedded** at the earliest stages in activity plans and interpretation design

Learning for Others

1. Access is a matter for the **whole museum team** and cannot be left to one department or individual. Whether it is front of house, curatorial, or digital there is something every department can do to make their museum more accessible
2. **Learn from others**, the barriers you and your visitors face are likely not unique There are so many people who have found inventive solutions and so much to learn from
3. **Be honest** about what you could do better or don't have. It is better for people to know upfront and make their own decisions about visiting

Find out more about how MD North can support you to make your museum more accessible on our website or contact Liz Denton liz.denton@museumdevelopmentnorth.org.uk