

How Can Young People with SEND Demonstrate Social Impact by Being Involved in Meaningful Consultation around Inclusion and Accessibility with Cultural Venues?



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Summary

This project focused on how to create a meaningful programme of consultation with a group of Sixth Form and Year 9 students with special needs from the Iffley Academy in order to:

- Gather feedback on access and inclusion for Vision 2024 – an ambitious redevelopment project to ensure the History of Science Museum (HSM) remains relevant, outward-looking and sustainable for the future.
- Create an Easy Read guide for the museum.

Background

The Iffley Academy is a community special academy for young people up to age 18 with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The History of Science Museum (HSM) is part of the University of Oxford and has worked with Iffley Academy students on previous projects.

Challenge

HSM's current Grade 1 listed building has poor access both in terms of its built environment and its displays.

How can access be improved for young people with SEND – what makes an accessible museum for them?

Approach

Museum staff planned and delivered a range of consultation events and activities at school, HSM and other recently refurbished cultural venues in Oxford to enable students to articulate and demonstrate what makes an accessible and inclusive museum experience.

Intended outcomes

- To ensure the voices of young people with SEND are at the heart of museum plans to tackle barriers to access.
- To enable young people with SEND to support work that impacts peers in the wider public and community.

Intended outputs

- A report providing evidence and suggestions for improving physical access at HSM and engagement with the collections.
- Feedback on a planned Easy Read guide.

Obstacles and issues

- This type of consultation work takes time and resources. It takes time to build rapport with students and to develop their confidence in sharing their views. The support of additional museum staff was required to enable recording of observations of student reactions, participation and verbal responses.
- Providing clear explanations to students at each stage of what we were doing and why required thought. We were lucky that Iffley Academy had recently been rebuilt, so we were able to frame the museum redevelopment project in this context.
- We had hoped to show architectural models and “fly through” films of the architectural plans but these were not available within the timescale of the project. The architectural drawings and floorplans we had were hard to visualise and make sense of, so we didn't use these with the students. This meant that we couldn't get very detailed feedback on very specific architectural changes.

Actual outcomes

- All students were able to give their feedback via a range of strategies such as facilitated discussion, voting, annotating images etc. We also used staff observations and recorded any comments students made during activities and visits. All of this feedback fed into a report for senior museum staff to reference in future planning meetings and decisions for Vision 2024.
- An Easy Read guide to the current HSM building was created and student feedback was incorporated throughout with changes made to include their suggestions.
- Teachers and museum staff observed a growth in confidence in many of the young people in engaging with different cultural spaces.

Actual outputs

- HSM staff have much better knowledge of the needs of young people with SEND and are able to advocate for them within the redevelopment plans.
- Students were able to use this consultation work and their visits to a variety of venues as evidence

for their ASDAN qualification (an accredited qualification which focuses on the development of personal, social and work-related abilities).

Lessons learned

- Planned sessions require a structured and scaffolded approach which provides the time and a range of opportunities for all students to practise sharing their views.
- Students needed to go through a series of activities over time to elicit feedback on unfamiliar environments and feel secure in offering their feedback.
- They needed to be actively engaged at each stage of the process and have a range of ways to give their feedback.
- The planning process for listed buildings is long and has many stages with new questions coming up all the time. It would be good to work with the group over a longer period to have a way to ask for feedback on specific questions or alterations to plans as they come up.

Next steps

- This multi-modal consultation has provided a model with which to consult with other groups with access needs for Vision 2024.
- This consultation model has also shown how other venues within the Oxford University Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) might seek to consult with young people with SEND (for example, Harcourt Arboretum) for their NHLF programme.
- This project is part of a wide-ranging partnership between Oxford University GLAM and the Iffley Academy. Please see our webpage for all our other collaborative project work.

Find out more

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