

## ROYAL ARMOURIES DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

### MISSION STATEMENT

**The Royal Armouries believes in the provision of equality of opportunity, and has a commitment to providing transparent, meaningful, educational access and linked services to all its visitors and employees.**

The Royal Armouries is the nation's foremost collection of arms and armour. It has a custom-built museum in Leeds, maintains its historic presence in the Tower of London and has a site for its artillery at Fort Nelson in Hampshire. Its close international connections include Russia, Kentucky, USA and the Nikko Toshogu Shrine, a World Heritage Site, in Japan - all of which have shared collections and projects with the Royal Armouries. Its prize objects include the very English armours of Henry VIII and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, but also, and perhaps most surprisingly, the only elephant armour and pangolin armour on open display in the world!

In recent years the Royal Armouries has embarked on a journey to promote the values of responsibility and respect, to establish partnerships and to address the misuse of weaponry and aggression.

The use of violence by humankind for supremacy or survival, or its sublimation into sport or play always has been, and probably always will be, one of the main forces for historical change. This is the underlying theme of the Royal Armouries, a fascinating and often disturbing story of great importance to our children and us.

Since the 1990s, the Royal Armouries has been working with various organisations to help people develop a real understanding of their safety and security.

Through educational and community work, exhibitions, gallery enhancements and partnerships, we have begun to address some of the most challenging and controversial issues facing contemporary society. The Royal Armouries recognises that disability and equality are at the core of the delivery of this vision.

### DUTY OF CARE

The Royal Armouries accepts that it has a duty of care for all those who suffer from exclusion of opportunity in gender, race, class and disability. Specifically the Disability Discrimination Act means that from December 2006 all public bodies have a duty to promote disability equality. It has changed the way our laws work in this area, from responding to individual disabled people making complaints to expecting the public sector to be positive in removing barriers.

Furthermore, the Act sets out what is known as the general duty and that public authorities must, in carrying out their functions have due regard to:

1. Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
2. Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
3. Eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
4. Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
5. Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
6. Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons

If a public authority does not comply with the general duty, its actions, or failure to act, can be challenged by means of a claim to the High Court for judicial review. A claim for judicial review could be made by a person or a group with an interest in the matter, or by the Disability Rights Commission.

The definition of disability is that used in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and applies to a wide range of disabilities. It is essential that museums consider the impact of their decisions on the full range of disabled people.

#### Working Towards our Vision

The major considerations of the Trustees, Directors and staff with responsibility for disability equality are:

- Access implementation requires emancipators and advocates of change, able to transform systems through community empowerment, and capable of sustained strategic thinking to effect change
- Access implementation requires advocates of an equal opportunities agenda for all stakeholders of the Collection
- Access implementation requires creative, committed and flexible facilitators in the organisation of group dynamics and partnerships
- Access implementation requires supporters of those whose histories, communities and interests could be said to be most at risk in the climate of the 21st century

#### Our Partners

The Royal Armouries has recently worked closely with the University of York, Leeds Society for Deaf and Blind People, West Oaks Special Inclusive Learning Centre, Makaton, Leeds Community Foundation and Acoustiguide to address issues relating to access, inclusion and equality. Guidance was also gained from the Disability Framework by the DCMS and the Disability Portfolios published by the MLA.

The Museum is working to:

- Raise the standard of Access across all three Royal Armouries sites
- Make explicit transparent, theoretical methodologies as part of a whole museum policy as well as an Access rationale
- Provide as part of the core requirement of the Museum an expression of Access through a range of physical, sensory, intellectual and cultural experiences, and rationalise how we can best proceed to combat socio-economic factors
- Identify and appraise our present Access services and ensure that these are equalised and rationalised across all three UK sites
- Develop a systematic and rational system of communicating values and behaviours, supported by a rigorous policy of addressing socially invalid beliefs including racism
- Recognise and value the importance of all our staff in undertaking and promoting Access to our many publics, and to this end provide a regulated, quantitative internal and external training regime

## EMPLOYMENT

The Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful to discriminate on any grounds related to disability in all areas of employment, including the right not to be harassed on the grounds of disability. The DDA 1995 places an obligation on the Museum to make reasonable adjustments to the working environment, arrangements, conditions and working practices to accommodate the needs of disabled employees and prospective employees.

The Royal Armouries currently employ 206 employees, of whom 6 have told us they have a disability. Our objective is to have a diverse workforce and to ensure equal and appropriate treatment in employment. We aim to:

- Provide fair access to employment opportunities
- Provide fair access to learning and development opportunities and encourage and support staff in fulfilling their potential
- Provide a safe and accessible working environment that values and respects the individual and is free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Involve and communicate effectively with members of staff and our trade union
- Provide equality of access to fair and transparent pay and reward systems

We strive to do this by:

- Ensuring that our employment opportunities and communications are practically, culturally and - as far as possible - physically accessible

- Ensuring that potential and existing staff members are treated equally and fairly and that decisions on recruitment, selection, promotion and career management are based solely on objective and job-related criteria
- Monitoring the impact of our policies and taking appropriate steps to address any discrimination
- Monitoring disability in recruitment and retention and disciplinary matters
- Promoting flexible working options
- Dealing promptly with complaints of discrimination
- Enforcing staff disciplinary procedures where the disability equality policy is breached

## TRAINING

The Royal Armouries recognises that increased awareness amongst its staff on issues relating to Access, Inclusion and Diversity is an important part of the removal of the barriers for disabled people.

The Museum has compiled a training plan and allocated resources to educate staff members about Access, Inclusion and Diversity.

Every new colleague receives information about these issues during the induction process. A series of dedicated seminars and workshops are delivered by appropriate external organisations to ensure our teams are aware of the issues and feel confident to respond appropriately and sensitively to all our visitors. Individual team members who want more knowledge and training in this area can request further support through the personal development planning process.

## EDUCATION

The Disability Discrimination Act gives disabled people equal rights to the provision of education.

Through interactive and hands-on programmes the Education Department has developed multi-sensory, tactile and multi-cultural sessions for all, whether as part of mainstream education or for special needs groups. This integrated approach enables all auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners to have equal access regardless of physical, social or cultural barriers.

## BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

During the design process of our new buildings and refurbishments of our existing sites, consultation with Access experts has been an essential element of the process.

The development of our main museum in Leeds in 1996 fully involved all the appropriate agencies in its construction to ensure access to all. This does not mean that the organisation has been complacent since then and we continually monitor to ensure that all alterations and changes to exhibitions incorporate best

practice.

The Museum recognises that Access, Inclusion and Disability must be at the core of its vision to all enable all visitors to enjoy and learn of its collection therefore work has been undertaken to create an environment in which disabled people can enjoy the museum and its facilities. This includes design briefs, staff training and web site development.

The Royal Armouries now proactively takes the collection out of the Museum as part of an outreach programme that is targeted at people who are disabled or socially excluded. A handling collection has been established which allows groups and individuals the opportunity to access the collection in their own environment.

Example: The Tower of London

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Staffs are currently working with Oaklands School-partnership as part of MLA funded project to produce an interactive learning 'book' to enhance their visit to the site.

Exciting new sessions, involving our Artist in Residence, form the basis of our innovative outreach work sponsored by Kodak. The first group is from a school in Islington which is bringing 7 pupils, 6 of whom are wheelchair users and 1 visually impaired.

Example: The Elephant Armour, Oriental Gallery, Leeds

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In 2007-8 the Royal Armouries Museum funded a project linked to one of its most iconic objects, the elephant armour. It has made provision for Disabled Access within a linked approach to equality and through a multi-layered format. The project welcomes the disabled into the decision-making process as we begin the journey to integrated equality. This has included the involvement of Neil Ackroyd, a visually impaired member of the Leeds Society for Deaf and Blind People who commented "Things like the 17<sup>th</sup>-century armour are too fragile to touch, so by making replicas that someone blind can hold the elbow joint of the suit, and feel how the hinges work, is essential to giving access to all".

## CONCLUSION

The Royal Armouries acknowledges that to meet new standards in the Rights of the Disabled priorities must be considered and then facilitated with the appropriate budgets. Keynote features include:

- strategic thinking in framing policies
- making coherent provision for training and staffing levels
- management responsibilities and staff working parties to construct cross-departmental practices
- providing transparent, annual, financial assessments in the use of public funding in areas such as Social Inclusion and Disability
- an annual review of knowledge and cultural ownership
- an annual review of a culturally, economically and socially-diverse public programme.