



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

# Historic Royal Palaces

## Access Policy

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### **Key Facts and Purpose**

- This policy applies to all HRP employees, volunteers, and contractors
  - This policy covers how people can see, use, and reference our collection, gain access to our sites, and how we share information about the collection with people
  - This policy is approved through HRP's Board of Trustees and overseen by HRP's Collections Group
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### 1. Introduction

Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) is committed to maximising sustainable access for everyone. For the last 26 years, since we became a charity, we've been committed to helping everyone explore stories and stir spirits. But today, still, not everyone can visit us in person, or access our content online. To be for everyone, everywhere, we will need to significantly extend our reach and deliver meaningful work that has a real impact on people's lives.

Access, both physical and intellectual, is a key area for improvement for HRP across all of our sites. The aims and ambition of our access improvements need to be seen through the lens of our new strategy, specifically the following from the three strategic pillars:

- **Reach further.** We believe in equity, fairness, and access for everyone. We'll be truly inclusive and accessible. We won't let geographic, financial, physical, intellectual, attitudinal and cultural barriers get in the way.
- **Mean more.** We want everyone to find their own meaning and connections in the stories we share, and so we will create experiences everyone can enjoy on their own terms.
- **Act for the future.** If we're a charity for everyone we must act not just for people now, but for those who are yet to come. Our job is to give these sites the care they deserve, passing them on with restored beauty and power, better equipped to inspire everyone.

Our Access Policy sets out our ambitions and recognises that it is our ethical duty to do all we can, within the limits of our buildings and affordability, to make our sites, collections, physical or digital, on display and in store, accessible, comprehensive and relatable to as many people as possible regardless of ability, age, race, gender, cultural or social background, sexual orientation, faith, language, location or wealth. We recognise that there are many barriers to access at all levels but are committed to removing as many of these barriers as our resources allow, including access to buildings, collections, events, exhibitions and learning; for all our users.

### 2. Scope

This policy covers the provision at The Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace, Kew Palace and Pagoda, The Banqueting House, Whitehall and Hillsborough Castle and Gardens in Northern Ireland and access to our collections in store. Access to the HRP collection is carefully monitored to ensure that the conservation requirements are not compromised or threatened, and all appropriate risk mitigations are taken to secure the future preservation and continuing public enjoyment of the HRP collection. (See the Collection Care and Conservation Policy, 2024).

This provision can be provided through our website, social media channels and other online activity and at our venues through interpretation, education and learning programme and outreach provision to schools, community groups and other groups. This policy relates to access by our users and doesn't cover access in relation to staff, volunteers, freelancers, consultants, or contractors.



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### 3. User Needs

Evaluation and analysis from our audience research has been used to formulate a five-year Audience Development Plan. This is a road map for change, outlining the organisation's vision for who it wants its audiences to be and how it will reach and engage with them. It identifies what success will look like and includes both new and existing audiences.

User needs are collected and evaluated from a number of audience research methodologies including but not limited to:

- a combination of primary research data and operational data to find out about who visits our sites and accesses our services.
- regular research with our members to understand the demographic and behavioural profile of our member base.
- collection of reach data for our schools and community engagement programmes and monitor the numbers of external event attendees.
- We use operational data including ticketing data and on-site scanning to monitor visitor place of residence, ticket type purchased, and data visited.

Our Audience Development Plan collected information on who our current and potential users are, and what they might want from us going forwards.

An additional output of this work was a refreshed behavioural segmentation, which enables us to take a more audience-led approach to our projects and programmes.

We also conduct ad hoc research projects with specific audience groups e.g. young people, Social Families, and digital audiences, to understand in more detail what the needs and expectations of users are.

From this work and from our work with our access consultants we have identified the following key barriers to access:

- **Attitudinal** – eg some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, HRP and the subjects and issues it deals with, or our programmes and services
- **Intellectual** – eg some people may find HRP too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented; some may have learning disabilities or learning difficulties which affect their ability to engage with our sites and content; and some may not be able to read or speak English.
- **Cultural** – eg some people may feel that HRP is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests
- **Economic** – some people may not be able to afford to visit our sites or take part in our programmes
- **Geographic** – some people will live too far away to visit one of our sites



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- **Physical/sensory** – including people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access our sites, our website, social media channels or programmes.

We intend to build on this knowledge. By summer 2025, Hampton Court, Hillsborough Castle and Gardens and Kensington Palace will have comprehensive access audits with action plans with measurable outcomes to improve accessibility across these sites. The Tower of London's audit which was last carried out in 2015 will be updated in 2025/6. From these will flow action plans which will, in the main, cover improvements to physical accessibility but will also touch on sensory and intellectual barriers.

### 4. Policy

4.1. HRP is committed to maximising access across all areas of its work, our overall strategy is to be a charity for everyone. This policy sets out a number of ways in which HRP will achieve this. We will uphold the statutory requirements of the Equality Act (2010) by taking reasonable steps to ensure that policies, practices, and procedures do not discriminate.

#### 4.2 Physical access

##### 4.2.1 Buildings

Our buildings are all of a historic nature and most are listed or even Scheduled Ancient Monuments and therefore require permission from DCMS for changes and adaptations.

Providing full physical access to all our spaces isn't possible. Where harm to the historic fabric is deemed to be too great to provide adaptations such as the inclusion of lifts, we will instead provide alternative access such as digital recreations, alternative routes or online access which enable disabled people to use our spaces; and by removing, altering or circumventing physical barriers *within* our building.

#### **In order to improve and elevate physical access to our buildings we will:**

- endeavour to install lift access to all public spaces
- ensure, as far as reasonably practical, that all our galleries, exhibitions, (including individual exhibits), visitor routes, learning spaces (including interactive whiteboards and computers), cafés, cloakrooms, toilets and information, shop and ticket desks are accessible to wheelchair users. This includes considering historic surfaces such as cobbles and how to make these more usable for wheelchair users and those with prams or buggies.
- provide traditional wheelchairs and if appropriate motorised wheelchairs / mobility scooters which can be booked by users for use on site
- provide plenty of accessible seating throughout our buildings



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- provide access to objects not on display to the public wherever possible and appropriate. Collection store access is facilitated, controlled and monitored by curators or conservators. Booking systems and areas for studying collections will be accessible.
- Ensure that wider public access to the HRP collection, both on site and remote, will be taken into account in the design and management of collection storage facilities as part of our conservation and collections management plans.
- Creating virtual tours starting with hard-to-reach spaces being interpreted for visitor on site via their own devices. We kick off this work with a pilot tour of the Beauchamp Tower.

### 4.2.2 Collections

We recognise the opportunities to provide wider public access to the HRP collection and information relating to it, through a multi-channelled approach, via special access facilities, on site interpretation, on-line and digital applications and other media.

The HRP Permanent Collection is primarily displayed in the context of re-created historic room settings at the palaces, which are generally interpreted together using a range of methods that complement these important palace buildings and their integral collections. There are dedicated exhibition spaces at Kensington Palace and the Tower of London where objects may be displayed in display cases, as well as appropriate open display methods which have been used since the opening in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. We continue to be committed to using this method of display where appropriate to collection objects, while recognising and addressing the long-term conservation and security issues this may present for certain areas of the Collections.

In order to maintain access to our collection we will

- Maintain a vibrant exhibition programme displaying objects as appropriate in cases where required.
- Maintain the recreated historic room settings.
- Put as much of the HRP Permanent collection on public display as possible.
- Limit storage where possible to objects that are unsuitable for continuous displays for conservation reasons, with categories of objects providing a research resource.
- Provide access to objects not on display to the public wherever possible and appropriate. Collection store access is facilitated, controlled and monitored by curators or conservators while all appropriate risk mitigations are taken to ensure object safety.

### 4.3 Sensory access

Sensory access is important for large numbers of visitors including autistic people and people with a learning disability, such as people with dementia / memory loss, a hearing or visual impairment, or mental health condition. Recognising the historic nature of our buildings, many of which are listed or scheduled ancient monuments, we are sometimes limited in the physical modifications we can make. However, we are dedicated to providing alternative means to enhance sensory access within these constraints. Our aim is to create an



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inclusive environment where all visitors can experience and enjoy our heritage site, while still preserving the integrity of our historic buildings.

### **We will**

- provide training for our front-of-house staff so they will have the awareness and skills to successfully communicate with and provide a quality service to people with specific sensory needs
- follow the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and Action on Hearing Loss good practice guidelines including in our exhibitions and galleries range of multisensory exhibits (eg to touch, smell, listen to) and incorporating Braille, large print and tactile images, hearing loops, assistive listening devices where appropriate
- Using clear signage, high-contrast text, and visual guides to support visitors with visual impairments.
- ensure that films or video-based exhibits have subtitles if they use the spoken word and that, budget allowing, key audio-visual exhibits that are central to a permanent route or exhibition's main message include BSL as well as subtitles
- Alongside the permanent collection, maintain a small handling collection managed by the Public Engagement department to engage audiences through Object Based Learning initiatives.
- offer touch tours, British Sign Language (BSL) and other events that are specifically designed for people with sensory impairments and advertising these on our website and through channels designed to reach this audience
- providing specially developed tours on our digital visitor guides for visually impaired visitors where appropriate
- develop our online content and website to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.2 AA Standard
- Continue to offer 'Sensory Palaces', a wellbeing programme for people living with dementia and their companions
- Rolling out times when we adapt our exhibitions (i.e. changing lighting or switching off music) to better meet these needs of neurodivergent audiences, and designating quiet areas or quiet times for visitors who may be sensitive to noise, ensuring a comfortable experience for those with auditory sensitivities.

### **4.4 Intellectual access**

We are dedicated to ensuring that all visitors, including those with intellectual barriers, can fully engage with and enjoy our palaces, estates, collections and stories. To support this commitment, we will implement best practices that cater to diverse learning needs and cognitive abilities. By adopting these practices, we strive to make HRP an inclusive space where every visitor can engage with and enjoy our sites and content.

### **We will**



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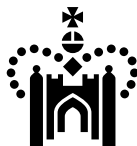
- ensure that the text used in our galleries, exhibitions, educational resources, publications, website and social media channels is carefully tailored to the needs of their intended audiences, in line with the HRP's style guide and Inclusive Language and Etiquette guide
- provide effective wayfinding signage and sites maps
- ensure that the content and delivery of our learning programmes are tailored to the learning needs of their audiences. For our temporary exhibitions we will seek the advice of EDI's specialist (who are engaged on a Framework basis) to make our exhibitions as accessible as possible. For our live performances we will develop frameworks for accessible practice in inclusive dramaturgy
- provide a tailored programme for special schools and SEN units in mainstream schools and colleges. We continue to offer an onsite SEND programme with specialist sessions at three palaces (Tower of London, Hampton Court and Kensington Palace)
- provide maps, Digital Visitor Guides (DVG) and at Tower of London top level signage (our site with most overseas visitors) in key tourist languages and use clear simple language in our signage, labels and explanatory material
- put key information on our website in the main tourist and community languages used by our audiences
- actively work to identify teacher and student needs and potential barriers to engagement.
- maintain a Teacher Network of approx.. 500 teachers to consult with and where relevant, (eg the SEND programme), we work with external specialists and consultants to ensure best practice.
- provide our session leaders with regular training to heighten awareness and deepen skills in effective teaching and learning techniques for children with diverse needs, as well as evolving needs and priorities of school visitors in general.
- respond to sector-wide issues as appropriate for example media and teacher reports of the effect of the pandemic on student mental health led to a wellbeing project.
- underpin and inform everything we do with authoritative research, as part of our core function to look after, interpret, and engage audiences with the buildings, landscapes, and collections in our care, in line with our Research Strategy and status as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO).

### **4.5 Attitudinal access**

We aim to transform perceptions and demonstrate that HRP is a vibrant, inclusive space where all visitors can find relevance, inspiration, and a sense of community.

#### **We will**

- Create promotional activities that present HRP as a welcoming, nonthreatening, inclusive destination in which space for debate and discussion is welcome



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- ensure that visitors are made to feel welcome on arrival and are put at their ease throughout their visit
- create environments in which people can feel comfortable, valued and able to learn at their own pace and level and find information that includes different perspectives.
- Train our staff to communicate to our visitors and to each other in a respectful and inclusive manner. Words matter: they can be the difference between someone feeling accepted and welcomed, or excluded.

### 4.6 Cultural access

We aspire to be a cultural hub that welcomes and celebrates the diversity of all communities. We are dedicated to overcoming cultural barriers and ensuring that our palaces, estates, collections and programmes are accessible and meaningful to people from all cultural backgrounds. We aim to make HRP a place where cultural diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated, and where every visitor feels a deep sense of connection and belonging.

#### We will

- aim to put as much of the HRP collection on public display as possible and to fully interpret it as we do so. Storage will normally be limited to certain categories of objects unsuitable for continuous display for conservation reasons, categories of object providing a research resource such as architectural fixtures or archaeology, objects removed as a result of re-display and objects awaiting conservation or display in the near future. For the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection (RCDC), we seek to display as much as we can through our varied exhibition programme, and to make the stored collection accessible through store visits, loans to other organisations and digital content.
- through our Community Access Scheme, upskill community gatekeepers to confidently deliver group visits to our palaces for their groups. We provide group leaders with guidance, printed/digital resources and learning spaces, helping them deliver a visit that means the needs, expectations and pace of their group.
- Offer ESOL resources that tutors can use to support learners engage with history and wider experience of visiting a major attraction: using public transportation, wayfinding, reading symbols.
- Equip our staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills to interact respectfully and effectively with visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Partner with cultural organisations and community groups to co-create content and programmes that resonate with their members and promote mutual understanding.
- Use diverse media and platforms to reach and engage with communities, ensuring our messages are inclusive and widely accessible.

### 4.7 Economic access





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HRP believes that financial constraints should never prevent anyone from experiencing and enjoying our buildings, collections and stories. We are committed to ensuring that our sites and content is accessible to everyone, regardless of their economic situation.

### **We will**

- Open our sites at times of day and year that mean they are accessible to as wide range of audiences as possible. (see our website for opening times and dates [hrp.org.uk](http://hrp.org.uk))
- ensure finance isn't a barrier to access by continuing to offer £1 tickets for those on Universal Credit and other named benefits and their families. We also offer free companion / carer tickets for those accompanying those with disabilities. Children under 5 can come for free with paying adults. We offer discounted tickets for young people, disabled visitors, students and those over 65 and groups. Once on site those who have taken advantage of £1 ticket are also offered discounts in our cafes. We also offer a membership scheme which provides a good value way of visiting our sites and encouraging repeat visits.
- Continue to explore further measures and opportunities to discount entry through the greater flexibility of our new ticketing system, exploiting offers and considering free open days
- Continue to provide outreach programmes to primary and secondary schools that find it difficult to meet the cost of visiting our sites and our community programme 'Amazing Days Out' which aims to create memorable days out for families experiencing financial hardships
- Continue to run an education access scheme offering small grants and free entry to help schools in disadvantaged areas visit our sites and participate in our programmes
- Clearly communicate available discounts, free days, and financial assistance offers to ensure that all visitors are aware of the opportunities to visit our sites affordably.

### **4.8 Geographic access**

We are aware that the majority of our sites are London based therefore we must work hard to reach those who live further away. We aim to bridge the geographic divide and ensure that everyone, regardless of location, can access and benefit from our content.

### **We will**

- not assume that our content is only accessed on high-spec expensive mobile phones, or assume that everyone has the ability and confidence to use tech to access our digital content. Nor will we only make essential information available via digital platforms.
- provide a rich visual online experience including partnerships for example, with Google Arts & Culture, and by producing content that can be enjoyed even if you aren't visiting our sites, this will include content such as podcast episodes that describe our palaces
- actively lend objects to enhance the physical geographical reach of our objects and foster mutually beneficial partnerships with partner organisations.



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- Start to tour some of our exhibitions or experiences nationally to provide increased access to the objects in our care and our stories.
- Create programme of online and live streams events for schools and universities we (expect to be able to offer this by 2030)
- Continue to digitise our collections and embed collections content through the website and plan to make sections of the Collections Management System public available in the next five years.
- Scope further opportunities to work in partnership with UK cultural organisations to reach beyond London and SE
- Continue to run our Access Fund which offers free sessions and travel bursaries to schools with higher-than-average numbers for Pupil Premium, EAL and SEND
- Offer self-led Home Educator visits hosts Home Educator days specifically designed for this audience.
- Offer trails in EAL, French and German and an EAL guided tour for international school visitors.

### **5. Related legislation, standards and ethics**

Historic Royal Palaces will adhere to the following legislation including:

Equalities Act (2010)

Public Records Acts 1958

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Data Protection Act 1998

Copyright Acts

Equality legislation in Northern Ireland:

- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006
- Employment Equality (Repeal of Retirement Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended)
- Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997



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- Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003
- Civil Partnership Act 2004

We aim for best practise by going beyond legislative minimum by following the guidance and advice of specialist organisations including but not limited to

National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) – see [rnib.org.uk](http://rnib.org.uk)

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) – see [actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

Mencap – see [mencap.org.uk](http://mencap.org.uk)

We will also adhere to the following codes of ethic and museum /heritage related standards

Code of Ethics for Museums (Museums Association)

ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (International Council of Museums)

Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (Arts Council)

Ethical Guidelines 4 – Access (Museums Association)

## **6. Document Controls**

### **6.1 Policy review procedure**

The Access Policy will be reviewed and published from time to time, at least once every two years. The Policy is next due for review on or before July 2026.