

ULITA: Improving access for visitors with disabilities

What was the issue?

ULITA is an Archive of International Textiles, housed in St Wilfred's Chapel on the University of Leeds campus. Its purpose is to collect, preserve and document textiles from around the world. People can consult the archive by appointment or visit the public exhibition area.

The archive wished to improve access to its collection for people with disabilities, taking into account their limited available resources. The issue had been highlighted as an Accreditation area for improvement.

How did Museum Development Yorkshire help?

ULITA applied for support from Museum Development Yorkshire (MDY), which resulted in help from Phil Chambers, a consultant who has advised other museums on this issue.

What happened?

The access survey revealed a number of positive points, particularly around the building and its location close to other facilities on the University campus. The challenges are to ensure that the archive complies with equalities legislation and the needs of its current and potential disabled visitors, whilst caring for a collection which is sensitive to light and physical handling.

Phil was able to suggest a number of improvement measures for the archive to consider. These included making the new website fully accessible, the provision of a large computer screen and braille information to help people with visual impairments and audio descriptive devices and an audio loop for people with hearing impairments. Some of these could be considered jointly with other archives or University departments. Other measures that had no cost attached could be

implemented immediately such as a review of public information, for example, repositioning the height of wall charts to help wheelchair users.

One way forward is to work collaboratively with others to identify and implement changes. Members of the staff team visited Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust which has recently made significant improvements at Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet. They will also develop stronger links with groups of disabled people and with organisations that support them.

Overall, the recommendation is to embed future ways of working that will benefit all potential visitors, including those with disabilities.

Find out more

ULITA – ulita@leeds.ac.uk

Museum Development Yorkshire – Liz Denton liz.denton@ymt.org.uk

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