

# **Evaluating Inclusion and Accessibility in Museums for School Aged Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

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## Introduction

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Over the course of the last five years, the United Kingdom has been placed within the top two of the Soft Power 30 Index ranking. This ranking indicated that compare to the other 29 countries, Britain is on the forefront considering its soft power which might give an important role for its uncertain future after Brexit. The United Kingdom's soft power strengths are Culture and Education sub-indices. In the index, London has been highlighted for its abundance of museums and galleries (Mcclory, 2019).

London acts as a role model in global context; plays significant role of setting example of how museums and galleries should set their values. As Arts Council England stressed in its previous framework that everybody should have the opportunity to experience arts (ACE, 2013). Inclusion and accessibility are significant values that museums and galleries need to consider. 'If a museum or other visual art setting is not accessible to everyone, then such institutions are exclusive and not meeting the needs of a diverse society.' (Kennedy, 2006: vi)

'I experienced many difficulties with inclusion and inequality, which is typical of people with ASD.', said Mark Barrett, who is on the autistic spectrum and had the chance to participate in the Training Museum programme. As part of this programme, Mr. Barrett was able to contribute toward making a museum accessible and inclusive for diverse audiences, for example people with ASD. 'When speaking about diversity and access in museums for people on the autistic spectrum you can't possibly do so without mentioning the key issue of understanding and awareness. This in itself forms the framework from which to construct autism access.' (Barrett, 2017) The National Autistic Society is stressing the importance of awareness and understanding as well, and suggests to challenge the assumptions and misconceptions that make people on the autistic spectrum isolated from society. 'Even a small amount of understanding can help transform perceptions and improve autistic people's experiences' (NAS, 2020)

## Statement of the Problem

Autism affects 1.0 percent of the population (NHS, 2020). It is estimated that there are 700,000 people on the autistic spectrum in the United Kingdom and if we include their families, autism is a part of daily life for 2.8 million people (NAS, 2020). Without understanding and awareness, people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their families are at risk of developing mental health problems, being isolated and excluded from society. In order to promote a fair and equal society, all people effected need their rights to be represented.

Since the Disability Discrimination Act came into effect in 1995, it is illegal to discriminate against people because of their disabilities. 'People with disabilities can no longer expect just to be included: the service must adapt to the person with the disability by making reasonable adjustments.' (Graham, 2008: 14) Reasonable adjustments are straight-forward in case of physical impairments: use of sign-language for people with hearing impairment, special assistance for people with visual impairment or wheelchair access for wheelchair users. Also, people are aware of these disabilities and recognise the need for help. However, defining reasonable adjustment in a case of people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder is very complex. This complexity can be recognised when comparing physical and social disabilities with the differing needs of people on the Spectrum. From 2010, the Equality Act provides Britain with discrimination law, where the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and other 8 pieces of legislation merged together for the protection against unfair treatment and the promotion a fair and more equal society.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport wants to ensure that 'everyone has the opportunity to experience and benefit from England's museums as research has shown that increased participation in museums and galleries may have positive effects on people's health and wellbeing (DCMS, 2019). Taking Part Survey by the Department clearly shows that people with long-standing illness or disability are significantly less likely to visit museums or galleries compared to people without long-standing illness or disability (DCMS, 2017). The survey

investigates the barriers of engagement<sup>1</sup> and has found that the third leading reason for not visiting museums is having health problem or disability.

It can be seen that the Equality Act 2010 is protecting the interests of disabled people, but it also raises the question of what is the 'reasonable adjustment' which has to be made for people on the Autistic Spectrum. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's and Arts Council England's goal is to make sure everybody is benefiting from arts. However, some research - for example, the Taking Part Survey - shows that there are still barriers for disabled people to visit museums and galleries.

## Statement of Purpose

The growing number of programs in museums and galleries now available for people with disabilities indicates growing awareness of the benefits of inclusive museums and galleries. This study is focusing on how to evaluate museums in terms of inclusion and accessibility for school aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

The purpose of this study is to understand what kind of challenges school aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder are facing when visiting a museum. It investigates the motivations, special needs and barriers when visiting museums and galleries, what kind of strategies are already applied and what the further recommendations in this environment are. This purpose will be accomplished through analysing the literature which specifically investigates the subjects above. Also, a case study of V&A Museum of Childhood will show how specific information, resources and support can be provided for school-aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder when visiting the museum.

The main purpose of this study is to understand how to evaluate inclusion and accessibility in museums and galleries. This purpose will be accomplished through combining all recommendations from the literature review and existing strategies from the case study into an Evaluation Form. The aim is to give an opportunity to be inclusive and accessible for organisations which have less opportunity (less funding or resources) to do so. This Evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> Engagement defined as visiting a museum or gallery according to DCMS in 2017.

Form is considered as the main product of this study and offered to any museum, gallery or cultural institution to self-evaluate their inclusiveness and accessibility for school aged children on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

## Literature Review

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### Autistic Spectrum Disorder

First publications on Autism were published in 1943 and 1944 by Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger - who independently of each other - attempted to explain the disorder with detailed cases. Both used the words 'Autistic' and 'autism', which come from the Greek word *autos* which means 'self'. It seemed that the people with autism were narrowing relationships to people and to the outside world; this could be as extreme as excluding everything else but the person's own self. (Frith, 2003)

Autism is a learning disability which has long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out day-to-day activities. It is 'a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them' (NAS, 2020). Autism is a spectrum condition, which reflects that people can share similar difficulties but the condition's characteristics can widely differ, it is effecting people in very different ways.

The term, 'autistic spectrum disorder' has become the most commonly used term during the diagnostic process. There are many different additional terms used for autistic people according to their autism profile presented by the individual, such as 'autism spectrum condition, atypical autism, classic autism, Kanner autism, pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), high functioning autism (HFA), Asperger syndrome and pathological demand avoidance (PDA)' (NAS, 2020). There are many additional condition that can be faced by autistic people, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

It is estimated, that about 1 in every 100 people is autistic, which means 700,000 people in the United Kingdom. (NAS, 2020 ) The number of people diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder is increasing. The reason for the increase, as suggested by researchers, is the continuously changing, expanding and widening of the diagnosis criteria.

The diagnosis criteria is set according to the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD)* by World Health Organisation. The following three criteria have to be present from an early age in order to be diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Firstly, poor eye contact, gestures and lack of personal relationship would suggest the 'qualitative impairment in reciprocal social interaction, relative to developmental level'. Secondly, delay in acquisition of language or lack of speech would suggest 'qualitative impairment in verbal and non-verbal communication, relative to developmental level'. Thirdly, narrow or intense interests and stereotyped movements would suggest 'markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests, appropriate of developmental level'. (Frith, 2003)

The characteristics of ASD differ from person to person and also depend on various environments. Dr Stephen Shore<sup>2</sup> is often quoted to highlight this fact: 'If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.' Despite the uniqueness of each individual, the traits of autistic spectrum disorder can be divided into three main groups, such as social interaction, communication and imagination (NHS, 2020). The condition affects people's interactions, verbal communication, gestures and facial expressions. Also, people with the condition find it difficult to understand their own and other people's emotions and feelings.

### Assumptions of Benefit

Some researches has investigated the benefits of visiting a museum from different perspectives, such as health and education. Taking Part Child Survey (2019) refers to research which 'has shown that increased participation in museums may have benefits for people's

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Stephen Shore is an autistic professor at Adelphi University. His researches are focusing on special education and the needs of people with autism.

health and wellbeing.’ During a visit to the museum with a child, especially programs targeting them, it is very likely that the program includes a creative and art activity.

Studies on the benefits of art making are thriving. Iwai’s (2002) research results related how arts contribute to education can be grouped into five categories: aesthetic, socio-emotional, socio-cultural, cognitive development and academic achievement. The findings on aesthetic development showed positive effects and enhanced children’s appreciation of the arts. The results on socio-emotional development found that art enhances children’s self-awareness, self-confidence, acceptance of others and awakens students’ interests and emotional growth. Researches showed positive effects on socio-cultural, cognitive development and academic achievement (Iwai, 2002). Also, Woodruff (2019) lists the different areas that art has the ability to affect, such as developing imagination, sensory regulation, emotional self-expression, developmental growth, visual-spatial skills, and the promotion of recreation skills. Alter-Muri (2017) wrote ‘Armaking increases emotional and oral communication with student’s inner and outer world.’ These researches show possibilities that being involved with art activities during a museum visit may have positive effects on children.

Visiting a museum has the beneficial effect of providing learning opportunities. Fox said that including disabled people in the museum experience can provide the benefit of high quality learning experiences (Fox, 2014 in Woodruff, 2019). A well-planned museum program considers different learning styles and understands the target visitor’s needs and motivations. ‘When goals are clear, feedback is unambiguous, challenges and skills are well matched, then all of one’s mind and body become completely involved in the activity’, writes Csikszentmihalyi (1995). He highlighted the importance of the relationship of challenges and skills. ‘If challenges are greater than skills, anxiety results; if skills are greater than challenges, the result is boredom.’ When the challenge and skill are matched, it is likely that there will be a more extensive learning interaction.

‘Museum can undoubtedly offer meaningful experience to their visitors and can be extremely beneficial to visitors with special needs, like ASD. However, people with special needs are among the most isolated, vulnerable, and least mobile group, requiring more support to access both exhibition space and collections within them (FOX 2014). Even though, visitors with special needs are vulnerable, museums can

contribute to social inclusion through specialised programs (Sandel, 2003 in Woodruff, 2019)

Overall, making art and visiting museum has assumed and proved benefits for people's health and education. Zedda (2013) highlighted the importance of being involved with museums: 'Museums can be so enriching for anyone's life and, I dare say, even more so for disabled people, who experience exclusion and discrimination in many areas of life and perhaps can find refuge, consolation, and inspiration in a museum that helps them grow, learn, and feel the magic of being human.' (Zedda, 2013: 359)

## Motivations

One of the motivator that Kulik (2016) writes about is the museum experience itself. It provides a sense of community and opportunities for unique experiences for the children that they might not experience otherwise.

A study by Langa et al. (2013) reported, the primary motivation when visiting a museum with an autistic child is a combination of interest and doing something meaningful and enjoyable together as a family. The study recognised the most important motivations, which were 'to be pleasantly occupied as a group', 'to enjoy ourselves', 'to be mentally stimulated', and 'to be better informed'. Also, 'spending quality family time together' and 'spurring connections between the museum exhibits and their child's interest' were listed as very important motivations. It can be seen, that the motivations mainly focus on the positive museum experience and the educational aspects of the museum. According to parents who participated in the research, meaningful experience would consist of a program which allows the child with autism to explore and experience independently.

## Special needs and Barriers

In order to understand the special needs and barriers faced by the examined visitors, I will discuss them in the order of their arising during a visit to a museum. Firstly, children on the spectrum can experience anxiety and confusion before the museum visit. It is very common that they fear of unknown situations. The aspect of meeting unfamiliar people can also cause

distress. Woodruff (2019) writes that a result of his research study indicates high stress levels and anxiety not only for the child on the spectrum but for the whole family. Secondly, anxiety and stress can be present too for various reasons, such as doing something different which is out of the routine, travelling to the museum, accessing, often queuing to get into the museum, seeing and being in the crowd during the museum visit. Also, being confused and lost are feelings the children on the spectrum often face. As discussed above, ASD also affects people's verbal and non-verbal communication. It can cause many barriers in the museums during a visit, for example not understanding people or situations which can cause great distress. Difficulties can arise when the child on the spectrum cannot focus his/hers attention. The museum environment can be a trigger for unpredictable behaviour due to sensory overload. Thirdly, after a negative museum experience, children with autism can display anxiety if the experience was stressful and mentioned after the visit.

## Strategies and Recommendations

By recognising the special needs and barriers of children with autism faced when visiting a museum, different solutions can arise. Drawing strategies and recommendations from the literature, I will put them into 3 categories, according to the time the examined visitors faced: before, during and after visit.

### Before visit

Before visiting a museum, children with autism can experience confusion, anxiety and fear of the unknown. It is an environment they may have never been and it is not a routine activity for them. It is not only affecting the child on the spectrum. A research (Woodruff, 2019) result indicated that the visit to the museum with an autistic child is very stressful for the whole family. The National Autistic Society suggests that to reduce the stress and anxiety and have a positive, enjoyable museum experience, the key is to plan and prepare.

The recommendation to provide and use pre-visit materials can be seen in many literatures. A pre-visit checklist (Kennedy, 2006) and tip sheet (Langa et al., 2013) could be a very useful material to be prepared for the visit. Sensory maps and guides (Shepherd, 2009; Langa et al.,

2013) can help during preparation with any fear of having sensory issues during the visit. The sensory maps and guides should indicate the areas which might be dark or bright, noisy or quiet, places with strong smell and could be crowded. Visual story and visual timetable (NAS, 2020), social stories (Shepherd, 2009; Langa et al., 2013) and social narratives (Woodruff, 2019) proved to be very useful to explain what can be expected when visiting the museum. These visual and social stories are also helping to set clear expectations for the visit (Langa et al., 2013) and it is a great way to discuss why museums have a distinctive environment and certain rules (NAS, 2020).

Dedicated websites (Langa et al., 2013) can provide a platform for all information and pre-visit material to be available for the examined visitors. Available direct contact (NAS, 2020) can help the parents in preparation as they can discuss particular needs; and thorough directions to the museum (Langa et al., 2013) thereby making the journey and arrival less stressful. Also, museums should consider that 'digital accessibility needs to be inclusive so that a piece of work can reach as wide an audience as possible.' (Zedda, 2013: 360)

The museums and galleries should also have an ASD awareness training (Kulik, 2016) for all staff. Understanding and awareness are key issues which take our society closer to inclusion. Woodruff (2019) highlights the importance of trained educational staff as well. Drawing educational strategies and tools for students with ASD from school settings can be useful for museums too. When providing training for museum staff, it is very important to work closely with specialised professionals in order to gain valuable information about the special needs of children on the autistic spectrum and their families. Kulik (2016) suggests that museum staff should recognise the motivations of the museum visit: 'Shifting perspectives to de-emphasize art as the focal point to access programs, and instead focus more on creating a supportive community environment through activities that facilitate the engagement of children with ASD may help museum personnel align their objectives with parents seeking inclusion'

## During Visit

Arriving and staying in the museum can be challenging for the examined visitors due to crowded places and big queues, which can cause anxiety and stress. 'Families that include children with ASD are often faced with challenges to accessing the museum comfortably and benefit from museum programs and exhibitions' (Au-Yeung et al., 2010 in Woodruff, 2019: 83). To avoid crowded places and big queues the literature suggests accessibility times (Woodruff, 2019). Early morning, especially on the weekend can be quieter times, which is more suitable for a visit (NAS, 2020). Kennedy (2006) suggests that different tools can be used for reducing anxiety and stress during a museum visit, such as handled squishy squeeze balls, knit juggling kit, tiny slinky, 'focus' stone, small wire puzzle. Anxiety can arise also from the situation when child feels lost and confused, which can be supported with 'I need help' sign and the use of maps and timetables.

Children on the autistic spectrum can face challenges with communication and have difficulty focusing their attention. Different communication systems should be used in order for better communication and understanding. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) should be used to support or replace communication for visitors who need it. Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) developed to improve the communication skill of young children (Freed-Brown, 2010). Symbol based AAC apps has been developed, for example Proloquo2go, in order to support people with communication in a more flexible and digital way, which gives much more opportunity to be personalised for the child's needs or for the museum program itself. Also, different sign languages are often used to support people on the spectrum, such as 'Signalong', which support communication by signing keywords while speaking, or 'Makaton, which is the more commonly used sign language amongst children with ASD at the present time in the United Kingdom. Using simple, straightforward language is important since the people on the spectrum can take information literally; metaphors and abstract expressions can cause confusion. Kennedy (2006) lists visual support of object based icons and communication boards from Ernsperger (2002) in order to ensure clear communication.

Challenges can occur for children on the autistic spectrum with hyper- or hypo-sensitivity for sensory input, which can cause sensory overload. Sensory overload often triggers unpredictable behaviours. Langa et al. (2013), Woodruff (2019) and the National Autistic Society (2020) highlights the need of a quiet room or space where the examined visitors can go to regulate, self-regulate and calm down. The quiet rooms in schools that specialised on students with autism are embedded and highly used places for calming strategies. Woodruff (2009) also suggests to keep the lighting and audio/visual noise levels down in the museum. However, it is not always possible and it would help only for the visitors with hyper-sensitivity and could give less opportunity for higher attention levels for hypo-sensitive visitors. The use of ear plugs or defenders (NAS, 2020) is suggested for people with auditory issues and white noise tapes (Kennedy, 2006) can be also used as a calming strategies. Kennedy suggests the use of aroma therapy through having cotton balls with pleasant smell. Also, when unpredictable behaviour occurs, such as meltdown, asking for a hug, the use of weighted blanket, weighted vest, deep breathing exercise and even a mirror to self-monitor emotions can support the children.

#### After Visit

After visiting a museum with autistic children, the National Autistic Society recommends to making a scrapbook of the museum visit. The scrapbook can include the whole experience from the very beginning, such as leaving the house till arriving back. It can help remembering and also reliving the whole experience. Also, as mentioned during the pre-visit materials, social stories and narratives can be a big help while preparing for the museum visit, this scrapbook could assist to prepare the individual in the same way before the next museum visit.

After the visit, it is very important to get feedback from the visitors in order to improve programs for children on the spectrum. Since every person with autism has very variable needs, the program needs to be highly flexible. To understand the special needs, getting feedback on the visit is key to success. Evaluation is a valuable tool for learning. Evaluation not only should happen after, but before and during a project too. Also, to improve programs, it is suggested to not only involve professionals in the field but involve people on the

spectrum. Giving an opportunity for visitors to give feedback and even involving them directly in the development of museum experiences can result in a museum which is ‘captivating for everyone’ and inclusive. (Simon, 2010, 2016 in Woodruff, 2019)

‘To make the programs accessible to children with autism, museums employ certain educational strategies to help the children connect to the activity or the objects. Simple changes, such as providing sensory activities or holding a program when the museum is less crowded, can allow children with ASDs and their families to have enriching educational experiences in a place where they may have previously felt unwelcome. As a result, families feel more comfortable bringing their children to a public place, a new community is fostered within the museum, and children with ASDs have an outlet for self-expression that may lead to behavioural improvements. The benefit of museum programs for children with autism to the autism community are significant and well worth it’ (Freed-Brown, 2010: 48)

## Case Study

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### V&A Museum of Childhood

V&A Museum of Childhood was chosen for the case study for the following reasons:

Firstly, the collection it holds is relevant to and in the interest of the examined visitors, school-aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. They are currently experiencing childhood and as a study showed (Langa et al., 2013), one of their primary motivation for the visit is interest driven.

Secondly, the Museum wants to create ‘an unforgettable first museum experience for children’ (V&A, 2020). The museum experience itself is another motivation for the visit for the examined visitors. (Kulik, 2016). It is highly possible that the children on the spectrum would have their first museum experience as statistical releases, such as Taking Part Survey indicated their lower engagement than the children without disabilities.

Thirdly, the Museum is aiming to be the international leader in engaging audiences and wants to be the leading centre of creativity for children. In this case, the Museum has a significant

role of setting an example, of showing the best practice, and being a role model in the global context.

## Background

V&A Museum of Childhood is the largest institution in the world of its kind, which holds the nation's collection of material culture and experiences of childhood. The Museum's mission is to be an international leader in engaging audiences. It is part of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which is a non-departmental public body. It is sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The Museum is currently closed for 2 years to undergo a significant £13m 're-imagination' of the building, galleries, collection and programming. The museum environment will be completely redesigned for the children, using more natural light, colourful spaces, playing and multi-sensory areas. The Museum was holding more than 40 co-design sessions to plan the redevelopment with school-aged children, families, teachers, special educational needs and disability representatives and community groups. The Museum's ambition is 'to create a world-class, free day out for the families'. (MOC)

## Autism and the Museum

On the Museum's website, there is sufficient information about access to the museum. It is clear, structured and easy to navigate between the webpages. There is a dedicated webpage for 'Access', where visitors with special educational needs – amongst the physical disabilities - get additional information and help.

There is a separate webpage for the examined visitors, called 'Visiting with an autistic child'. There is adequate information available to prepare the journey and the museum visit for parents with a child on the spectrum. The Museum has worked with families with children on the autistic spectrum to create resources to support their children's visit.

Pre-visit materials are available, such as 'tips for a great family visit' and 'Making SENse pre-visit guide'. The 'Tips for a great family visit' is a general page on making the museum visit

enriching. The 'making SEN-se pre-visit guide' is tailored for children on the autistic spectrum to get ready for the museum visit. It is developed by the Museum and designed to help families to prepare and show the child what to expect during a visit to the Museum. It is a flashcard photographic guide which narrates the museum experience from arriving to the museum until arriving back home.

In the Museum, there are resources available for the visitors with ADHD and ASD, such as 'Explorer Bags', 'Resource Boxes (Moving Toys, Clothes, and Sensory boxes)' and 'Making SENSE Family Packs'. These resources contain handling objects and activities to enhance the museum visit. The 'making SENSE Family Pack' is created by the Museum in the form of backpacks. These are available for visitors with special educational needs for free. There are different backpacks for different galleries. These contain maps, handling toys, activities and ear-defenders. Also, to help communication there are PECS symbols and photo booklets in the packs. The Museum holds inclusive days, called 'Quiet Days' for groups with special educational needs only. Resources and programs supported by the Big Lottery Fund and the Friends of V&A.

## Methodology

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This paper is analysing and categorising the literature review and case study in order to accomplish the purpose of the study, to produce the Evaluation Form for museums, galleries and cultural institutions in order to be inclusive and accessible for school-aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

The literature review and case study's main points are categorised into 3 main parts: before, during and after the visit and this categorisation acts as the timeline of the visit in the museum of the examined visitors. The issues arising at each stage linked to strategies and recommendations drawn from the literature review and case study. (Table 1.)

Table 1.

<b>Literature Review and Case Study</b>			
<b>Before Visit</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strategies and Recommendations</b>	<b>Reference Source</b>
	Confusion, anxiety, fear of unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'The key to enjoying a visit to a museum lies in <b>planning</b> and <b>preparation</b>.'</li> </ul> <p><b>Pre-visit materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>pre-visit checklist</b></li> <li>- <b>tip sheet</b></li> <li>- <b>sensory map / guide</b></li> <li>- <b>social stories, visual story, social narratives</b></li> <li>- <b>picture schedule of specific objects</b></li> <li>- <b>visual timetable</b> of the activities and the whole experience</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'preparing and setting <b>clear expectations</b> for the children's museum visit'</li> <li>- 'explaining why museums have a <b>distinctive environment</b> and <b>certain rules</b>'</li> <li>- <b>dedicated webpage</b> for families with children with disabilities</li> <li>- <b>direct contact available</b> for parents to discuss particular needs</li> <li>- better <b>directions</b> for public transit use</li> <li>- alternative route to avoid Shop and Café to <b>prevent distraction</b>.</li> <li>- '<b>Digital Accessibility</b> needs to be inclusive so that a piece of work can reach as wide of audience as possible.'</li> <li>- <b>staff training</b> for museums / ASD awareness course / trained educational staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NAS (2020)</li> <li>- Woodruff (2019)</li> <li>- Kennedy (2006)</li> <li>- Langa et al. (2013)</li> <li>- Shepherd, 2009</li> <li>- Langa et al. (2013)</li> <li>- NAS (2020)</li> <li>- Langa et al. (2013)</li> <li>- NAS (2020)</li> <li>- VOM (2020)</li> <li>- Lisney et al. (2013)</li> <li>- Kulik (2016), Woodruff (2019), NAS, 2020</li> </ul>
<b>During Visit</b>	Anxiety & Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Families that include children with ASD are often faced with challenges to accessing the museums comfortably and benefit from museum programs and exhibitions.'</li> <li>- <b>accessibility times</b>, quieter times</li> <li>- '<b>pleasant and patient staff</b>'</li> <li>- <b>anxiety and stress reducing tools</b>: handheld squishy squeeze balls, knit juggling ball, tiny slinky, 'focus' stone, small wire puzzle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Au-Yeung et al. (2010) in Woodruff (2019)</li> <li>- Langa et al. (2013), Woodruff (2019)</li> <li>- Shore (2001), Janzen (2003), Henry (2004), Emmons(2005), in Kennedy (2006)</li> </ul>
	Confusion, being lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- '<b>I need help</b>' sign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mirenda (2003) in Kennedy (2006)</li> </ul>
	Difficulty focusing attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tasks have got <b>positive and achievable outcome</b></li> <li>- '<b>Mobile devices</b> in particular help their ASDs children focus or engage with material.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sheperd (2009)</li> <li>- Langa et al. (2013)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>inclusive technologies</b></li> <li>- <b>interactives and objects are that are safe to touch</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lisney et al. (2013)</li> <li>- Woodruff (2019)</li> </ul>
	Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- AAC: use of <b>PECS or sign language</b></li> <li>- <b>'Be clear and direct.'</b> / Simple, straight forward language, pictures and diagrams</li> <li>- <b>object based icons, communication boards, magnifying glass</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Freed-Brown (2010)</li> <li>- Shepherd (2009)</li> <li>- Ernsperger (2002) in Kennedy (2006)</li> </ul>
	Sensory overload, unpredictable behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lighting and audio/visual noise down</li> <li>- <b>ear plugs or ear defenders, white noise tapes</b></li> <li>- <b>aroma therapy</b> (cotton balls with pleasant smell)</li> <li>- <b>quiet room / space</b></li> <li>- <b>ask for a hug, weighted blanket / garment, weighted vest, deep breathing, mirror to self-monitor emotions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Woodruff (2019)</li> <li>- NAS (2020), VOM (2020)</li> <li>- Henry (2004), Emmons (2005) in Kennedy (2006)</li> <li>- Langa et al. (2013)</li> </ul>
<b>After Visit</b>	Remembering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make a <b>scrapbook</b> to record the experiences of the day, reliving the visit to the museum.</li> </ul>	-NAS (2020)
	Giving voice	'Providing visitors with opportunities <b>to voice their opinions and participate in the development of museum experiences</b> , would lead to museums that are more appreciated by and captivating for everyone.'	- Simon (2010; 2016) in Woodruff (2019)

## Findings

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### Evaluation Form and Guidelines

The Evaluation Form (Table 2.) contains questions drawn from the literature review and the case study to self-evaluate how inclusive and accessible the museum, gallery or cultural institution is considering school-aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their families. Evaluation of an institution usually takes time and resources and involves gathering data and evidence; in case of a program, before, during and after a project. The Evaluation Form is following the structure of a museum visit, as in the previous chapters above.

Table 2.

<b>Inclusive and Accessible Museum For School-aged Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder</b>		
<b>Self-evaluation Form For Museums</b>		
<b>Before Visit</b>	<b>Issue:</b> Confusion, Anxiety, Fear of unknown	<p>Is the Museum providing <b>pre-visit materials</b> which will prepare the children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their families for the museum visit, show and explain the environment and its certain rules? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pre-visit checklist,</li> <li>- tip sheet,</li> <li>- sensory map or guide,</li> <li>- social story, narrative, visual story,</li> <li>- picture schedule or visual timetable.</li> </ul>
		<p>Has the Museum got a <b>dedicated webpage</b> for visitors with Autistic Spectrum disorders and contains information of every aspect of their visit? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pre-visit materials available on dedicated webpage,</li> <li>- opening times, quieter times in the Museum,</li> <li>- detailed direction into the Museum,</li> <li>- direct contact to discuss special needs of children with ASD.</li> </ul>
		<p>Is the Museum providing <b>training</b> for its staff in order to recognise hidden disabilities and provide assistance, such as Autism Awareness training?</p>
<b>During Visit</b>	Anxiety, Stress	<p>Is the museum providing <b>accessibility times / quiet times</b> for visitors with ASD?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there any <b>quick access</b> available for visitors with ASD? / Can visitors with ASD avoid long queues and crowded places during and after entering to the Museum?</li> <li>- Is the museum offering any <b>anxiety and stress reducing tools</b>, such as handled squishy squeeze ball, knit juggling ball, tiny slinky, focus stone, small wire puzzle, (etc.) or small object which related to exhibition?</li> </ul>
	Confusion, Being lost	<p>Are the signs are clear and visible, which makes the navigation easy in the museum? Is there any <b>'I need help'</b> sign or <b>special assistance</b> available?</p>
	Difficulty focusing attention	<p>Are there any <b>mobile devices</b> which can particularly help with the focus and attention of children on the spectrum to engage with exhibition material? Is the museum using <b>inclusive technologies</b>? Are there any <b>interactives</b> or <b>objects which safe to touch</b>?</p>
	Communication	<p>Is the Museum staff familiar using different <b>communication systems</b> which supporting verbal and non-verbal communication, such as PECS or sign language? Is there any <b>communication board or book</b> available to support communication? Is the Museum staff using <b>simple, straightforward language</b> and supporting it with visuals?</p>
	Sensory overload, Unpredictable behaviour	<p>Is the Museum's <b>Sensory Map</b> detailed, updated and easy to use? Does it contain information of light / dark, noisy / quiet, hot / cold, strong smells and odours, empty / busy or crowded places? Is there any <b>Quiet Room or Space</b> available for visitors with ASD? Is the Museum providing any <b>tools or strategy to prevent or reduce sensory overload</b>, such as ear plugs and ear defenders, white noise tapes, special glasses, aroma therapy cotton balls, weighted blanket, weighted vest, deep breathing exercises, mirror to self-monitor emotions, etc?</p>

<b>After Visit</b>	Remembering, Giving voice	Is the Museum providing any resources for the children with ASD in order to create a <b>Scrapbook</b> , which helps them to remember with details of the possible positive museum experience and helps them prepare for the next museum visit? Is there any <b>feedback</b> collected from the children with ASD and their families in order to give them voice and provide opportunity to participate the development of the inclusive museum programs?
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This Evaluation Form has been made for the use of museums, galleries and cultural institutions, which are aiming to be inclusive and accessible for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their families. By gathering data from recent and specific literature and from the case study of V&A Museum of Childhood, which has the mission to be an international leader in engaging audiences, this Evaluation Form provides comprehensive information of tools and strategies that can be used during a museum visit with children with ASD. The Evaluation Form shouldn't be seen as complete but flexible for changes according to the user institution and shouldn't be used as a 'tick list' since the complexities of each inclusive program can differ. This Evaluation form should be seen as a flexible tool which can bring museums, galleries and cultural institutions closer to the inclusive and accessible future. The future of the museums will change significantly, since the recent challenges.

### Challenges and Opportunities

In recent years, the United Kingdom's economic and political environment was and still is very unstable. One of the challenge is being faced is the separation from the European Union. It has been recognised that the United Kingdom's soft power is significant in order to continue to have a strong position and relationship with the surrounding countries and in the global context too. The Soft Power 30 Index is showing that the United Kingdom is recognising the importance of soft power and it is a forefront participant in the index for many years. This forefront position comes with great responsibilities, such as setting values and showing the significance of inclusion and accessibility as the country becomes a role model for many others. Other major challenges make the environment unstable, which the Arts Council England set to confront in its new strategy, such as 'inequality of wealth and of opportunity, social isolation and mental ill-health, and above all of these, the accelerating climate emergency' (ACE, 2019)

Another challenge is emerging during the time of this study, a global pandemic which is calling into question the future of the political, economic, socio-cultural and technological environment. Museums and galleries closed their doors for the public in March 2020 across the UK when the government introduced new measures to tackle the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic until further notice (Museum Association, 2020). Studies confirmed by UNESCO and International Council of Museums that nearly 90%, or more than 85,000 museums were closed around the world for varying length during the crisis and the majority is still not open for the visitors. According to these studies there is a chance that 13% of these museums will not reopen due to their inability to cope during the pandemic. 'Museums play a fundamental role in the resilience of societies. (...) We must work to promote access to culture for everyone, especially the most vulnerable and isolated' (UNESCO, 2020). During this pandemic Darren Henley was stressing the importance of making the cultural sector work for everyone and highlighting issues of inclusion of marginalised groups such as disabled people (Henley, 2020).

During the lockdown, closed museums can only connect to their audience online, through their website and different social media platforms. Museums used their website and social media platforms as a tool or a channel for communication but since the lockdown new trends have emerged. Museums are finding their ways to deliver public service through online platforms (Agostino, 2020). Online or digital exhibitions existed before the crisis, which were replicating or supplementing the physical exhibitions however this development is not stopping at 'digital copies' of exhibitions but 'creating materials that are designed with digital in mind' (Kahn, 2020)

'No question about it, there are new challenges, but in the face of these challenges there are also new opportunities' (Brendan, 2020). As Google Arts and Culture collectively provide opportunities for online visit of museums, galleries and cultural institutions for non-local audiences, in this crisis individual institutions are working on their own ideas and projects on how to reach their existing and new audiences and how to provide - similar to the physical - visitor experience in the digital world. It is a big opportunity for disabled people since the recent developments give more opportunity for digital engagement, hence digital projects can be more inclusive and accessible for them.

Not only the digital environment is changing but the physical visit to the museum will look different too after this crisis. The subject of the case study - V&A Museum of Childhood - probably in a good position since during their 2 year closing, they can calculate predictable changes and measures into their re-development. Introducing terms into the public's everyday life, such as social distancing, will form the museum experience in the future. Museum visits will have to be planned not only for disabled people for a positive museum experience through getting special assistance but for everyone since it is predicted to get access to museums after booking a time-slot. The capacity of the museums will be re-calculated during these fragile times in order to follow social distancing measures. A visit to the museum will be easier to plan and if the new system works well, long queues and big crowds won't be present during the experience. The museum experience will be more predictable, which is in favour of people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Also, this crisis gives an opportunity for disabled people to be more understood by others in terms of experiencing isolation. 'Even a small amount of understanding can help transform perceptions and improve autistic people's experiences' (NAS, 2020) It might highlight the importance of inclusive communities, which can be the focus of museums in the future. 'Many people are struggling to make sense of the world, and museums are perfectly placed to help us do so, (...) as collectors of our knowledge and culture.' (Kahn, 2020)

Overall, these challenges bring new opportunities to see the museum visit differently. Online offerings and the physical visit to the museum will change significantly and it is a big opportunity for disabled people to be a part of this re-development. The Evaluation Form can be used during this process as a tool of ensuring an inclusive and accessible museum visit for school-aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their families.

## Conclusion

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The United Kingdom's soft power strengths are Culture and Education sub-indices in the Soft Power 30 Index. London has been highlighted for its abundance of museums and galleries (Mcclory, 2019). Inclusion and accessibility are significant values which museums and galleries

need to consider as the United Kingdom is becoming a role model for other countries and its future success may depend on its soft power.

Inclusion and accessibility for people on the autistic spectrum is a key question in approximately 2.8 million people's lives in the United Kingdom. (NAS) The National Autistic Society is advocating the importance of autism awareness, and challenging the assumptions and misconceptions which lead to mental health problems, isolation and exclusion from society for the people on the spectrum. Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was and Equality Act 2010 is protecting the rights of people on the spectrum, however 'reasonable adjustments' can be made for them, in this case in museum context when the complexity of this social disability is fully understood.

In order to understand the complexity of this problem, Autism Spectrum Disorder needs to be investigated in terms of its characteristics. It is affecting people's social interactions, verbal and non-verbal communication, imagination, interests, the recognition of their own and others emotions and feelings and often have stereotyped movements. The complexity comes from the fact that the characteristics of ASD differ from person to person and depends on different environments.

Visiting a museum and engaging in art activities has assumed and proved benefits. It may positively affect health and wellbeing (Taking Part, 2019), education in terms of aesthetic, socio-emotional, socio-cultural, cognitive development and academic achievement (Iwai, 2002), imagination, sensory regulation, emotional self-expression, developmental growth, visual partial skills, and the promotion of recreational skills (Martin, Gerber, Kellman in Woodruff, 2019). Including disabled people in the museum experience can provide high quality learning experiences (Fox, 2014), and inclusive environment.

The motivations of a museum visit with a child on the spectrum are the museum experience itself (Kulik, 2016), a combination of interest and doing something meaningful and enjoyable as a family (Langa et al., 2013). The museum programs should de-emphasize the art as the only and main focus and create a supportive community environment (Kulik, 2016).

The positive museum experience can be achieved if the examined visitors' special needs and barriers have been identified and tools and strategies put in place to overcome them. Visiting a museum with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder can cause issues, such as anxiety, stress, fear of unknown, confusion, feeling lost, difficulty focusing attention, problems with communication, sensory overload and triggering unpredictable behaviours. These issues are linked with tools, strategies and recommendations drawn from specific literature (Table 1.)

The Evaluation Form (Table2.) is considered as a main product of this study and offered for museums, galleries and cultural institutions in order to self-evaluate their inclusion and accessibility for children on the autistic spectrum and their families. By gathering data from literature and case study, the Evaluation Form is providing a clear structure by its visitor-centred approach. The Evaluation Form should be seen as a flexible tool which can bring museums, galleries and cultural institutions closer to the inclusive and accessible future. The future of the museums will change significantly, since the recent challenges.

There are big challenges faced by the United Kingdom, such as Brexit, inequality of wealth and of opportunity, social isolation and mental ill-health, and the accelerating global climate emergency (ACE, 2019) and the global pandemic, which are changing the political, economic, socio-cultural and technological environment. Museums are rethinking their options for digital engagement and making necessary changes for the 'physical' visit. During this crisis radical changes will take place, which need to be thought of as an opportunity for creating an inclusive and accessible future for everyone.

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