



Access Policy for RBGE's Gardens and Collections

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1. Policy Statement

This policy sets out RBGE's approach towards ensuring that everyone can visit, use, and enjoy our Gardens and Collections, and that our knowledge, services, and activities are available to all, both now and in the future.

2. Context

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is Scotland's national botanical institute. Our work aims to respond to the twin challenges of the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency. We deliver world-leading plant science, conservation and education programmes to sustain species, habitats, livelihoods, and human health and wellbeing. Our four Gardens across Scotland are centres of engagement with the natural world, and our learning and outreach programmes build knowledge and skills nationally and internationally. Our Collections (Living Collection, Herbarium and Library and Archives) underpin our national and international research, education and conservation programmes and are of enormous cultural value. Together they make up one of Scotland's national collections and rank amongst the best of their kind in the world.

RBGE is a registered charity; a non-departmental public body sponsored and supported by the Scottish Government Environment and Forestry Directorate; an academic institution; and one of the Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes (SEFARI) working to deliver the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme. Our remit is set out in the *National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985* and guided by national and international treaties including *the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals* and Scotland's *updated Climate Change Plan: Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero*.

Our work centres around three pillars:

- Unlocking knowledge and understanding of plants and fungi for the benefit of society;
- Conserving and developing botanical collections as a global resource;
- Enriching and empowering individuals and communities.

In addition, we are bound by the *Equality Act 2010 (General Duty) (Scotland)* to have due regard in our work to the 'Three Needs' of the Act: 1) To eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the act; 2) To advance equality of opportunity; and 3) To foster good relations between groups who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

Ensuring that our Gardens and Collections are accessible to as wide a set of audiences as possible is, therefore, a key component of our remit and our obligations to the General Duty.

3. Scope

Delivering accessibility in relation to our Gardens and Collections is a core aspect of our EDI Strategy, and consistent with our obligation to pay due regard to the 'Three Needs' of the *Equality Act 2010*.

Our functions as Scotland's leading botanical institute and as a public body in Scotland include promoting greater diversity among groups who access and draw positive experiences from Scotland's cultural and heritage institutions. This can be achieved through reducing and/or removing barriers to engagement and participation.

The terms of this policy sit within RBGE's Strategic Objective to enrich and empower individuals and communities through learning and engagement with plants and fungi, and to enhance livelihoods, skills and wellbeing of communities in Scotland and around the world.

4. Definitions

In the context of this document the following definitions apply:

Access: The ability of anyone to engage with RBGE and our Collections, knowledge and expertise – whether in person or online.

This can be facilitated through:

- Enabling people to feel welcome and to explore our Gardens and their associated Collections in person, online and through other means including staff, Research Associates, contractors and Volunteers.
- Interpretation and learning offers which enhance that engagement.
- Accessible information that communicates the cultural significance of a property and its associated Collection.
- Applying high quality access planning and standards through all of the above to engage with a wide range of people, while safe-guarding our Gardens and their associated Collections for future generations.

Barriers to access: Anything that might reduce a person's ability to engage with the Gardens and their associated Collections.

5. Approach

This policy recognises that while *physical* access to RBGE's Gardens and Collections is an important aspect of this work, making our knowledge, experience, and activities accessible to everyone involves more than physical access alone. As well as access in physical terms to the on-site and other services RBGE provides, we must also consider access to the intangible; to stories and histories; to meaning and understanding; to enjoyment and well-being.

With regards physical access, we recognise the social model of disability:

'Unlike the medical model, where an individual is disabled by their impairment, the social model views disability as the relationship between the individual and society; it sees the barriers created by society as the cause of disadvantage and exclusion, rather than the impairment itself. The aim, then, is to remove the barriers that isolate, exclude and so disable the individual'¹

We further acknowledge that access relates to areas of experience other than disability, and consideration of diversity in its widest sense is key. We acknowledge the complexity of identity and the fact that inequalities based on different aspects of an individual can overlap to produce distinct, negative experiences. Accordingly, we seek to take an intersectional approach to access. This policy therefore relates to the ability of any individual to access and enjoy our spaces and collections on the basis of individual or intersecting aspects of their identity.

To achieve this RBGE will:

- Actively seek to increase the diversity of persons accessing our Gardens, Collections, or activities. In so doing, we will consider diversity in its widest sense, including all groups covered by equalities legislation, as well as socio-economic and linguistic diversity.
- Reduce or remove barriers to access and equality in the broadest sense, including social and cultural barriers to any group regardless of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership status; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation (i.e. paying due regard to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010).
- Enhance access for those whose first language may not be English, including Gaelic and British Sign Language as well as other languages.
- Actively seek opportunities to advance the aims of the *Equality Act 2010* by working towards the 'Three Needs' of the general equality duty: 1) To eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; 2) to advance equality of opportunity; and 3) to foster good relations between groups.

RBGE recognises that understanding barriers is key to helping us improve access. This includes being aware that public perceptions of botany and horticulture vary. As such, we need to be open to learning how people value the Gardens, the Collections and their associated stories. We should also be aware of cultural, linguistic or social differences in the ways in which groups communicate—for example how stories are told in the signing community, or the importance of alternative views of history to many marginalised groups—and incorporate that understanding into our planning. We need to be open to ways of engaging with people in innovative ways, which may not begin with botany or horticulture.

¹ A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: delivery plan ([ScotGov, 2016](#))

While recognising our responsibility to conserve the cultural and historical significance of our Gardens and Collections, we acknowledge that the experience of culture and history can vary between individuals and groups, and that there is no single view of either that is valid or true for everyone. Stories about the past and present are often contested. In this regard, RBGE will be guided by the principles of the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage sites², including:

‘Interpretation should be based on a well-researched, multidisciplinary study of the site and its surroundings. It should also acknowledge that meaningful interpretation necessarily includes reflection on alternative historical hypotheses, local traditions, and stories.’

In delivering the terms of this policy, RBGE will work to balance the need to be business-like and commercially successful with the aspiration to ensure that outreach and inclusion are at the forefront of our activities.

6. Our Access Objectives

This policy connects directly to the Outcomes of Scotland’s National Performance Framework, in particular:

- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
- We respect, protect, and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

It also supports the objective of the Scottish Government’s delivery plan³ for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In particular that:

‘Disabled people can live life to the full in homes and communities across Scotland, with housing and transport and the wider physical and cultural environment designed and adapted to enable disabled people to participate as full and equal citizens.’

This Access Policy’s key objectives are therefore:

- to proactively identify and reduce barriers to access to RBGE’s Gardens and Collections, the knowledge they contain, and the services we provide.
- to ensure that the physical and online spaces we offer are easy for the widest possible diversity of audiences to visit and enjoy, at all different levels of engagement.
- to ensure that the experience of our Gardens and Collections is positive for all, and that the stories we tell are meaningful for, and inclusive of, the widest possible diversity of audiences.
- to encourage engagement with groups currently less engaged with botany and horticulture, and to encourage their advocacy for the natural world.

² <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/13599183.pdf>

³ *A Fairer Scotland For Disabled People* ([ScotGov, 2016](#))

7. Delivering Access for All

To achieve these objectives RBGE will apply the following principles:

- **Lead** through adopting high standards and providing guidance
- Be **inclusive** by working with a wide range of partners
- **Raise awareness** in customer care and visitor-facing delivery
- **Improve understanding** of cultural and social differences, and preferences of diverse audiences
- **Enhance inclusive access** through all aspects of audience experience
- **Include** relevant stories about all sorts of people

These will be delivered via:

- **Access-led planning:** informing all work—see Equality Impact Assessments section below
- **Access-awareness training:** to ensure that staff, student and Volunteer attitudes to inclusive access are informed, positive and responsive.
- **Accessible communication:** to ensure that all communication is delivered to high access standards – through access-aware graphic design, positive language, plain English, high-quality translation, audio and audio descriptive tours, etc.
- **Clear pre-visit information in varied media:** allowing people to make informed choices in planning a visit.
- **Inclusive design:** covering of all aspects of the visitor/user experience including integrated interpretation and learning infrastructures and activities, accessible to a wide range of audiences. For example: on-line/digital content, guided tours, events or on-site interpretation including graphic panels, exhibitions, guidebooks, audio tours, downloadable materials, tactile displays, learning and public programmes etc.
- **Inclusive interpretation of our history:** through ensuring that whenever possible we research and include stories about those often marginalised in accounts of history.
- **Improved physical access:** improving access whenever reasonably possible through inclusive design. This will include for example, accessible paths, ramps and handrails, lighting gradation into low light areas, induction loops, tactile and other sensory displays, high quality graphic design, accessible parking spaces, or through lobbying for improvements where we cannot make them directly.
- **Ensuring access to services:** to provide and improve services which reduce or remove barriers to access including, for example, providing mobility scooters for those with limited mobility, arranging staff-facilitated access to Collections not on public display, organising outreach activities with seldom engaged-with audiences and those unable to make physical visits, providing access to British Sign Language interpreters etc.

8. Equality Impact Assessments

currently in development. The *Equality Act (2010) (Specific Duty) (Scotland)* introduces additional requirements for the impact of any new policy, event, or activity to be formally assessed via an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) against the 'Three Needs' of the *Equality Act* for each of the protected characteristics. While RBGE is not currently covered by the Specific Duty, the use of Equality Impact Assessments for our activities will be integral in meeting our commitments to access laid out in this document. Where possible and appropriate, opportunities to reflect on potential impacts of a new activity on groups covered by the protected characteristics of the Equality Act will be built into existing planning processes.

9. Evaluation

To ensure that our implementation of this policy is effective we will evaluate:

- This draft operational plan through a range of user groups from a diverse set of communities and expert groups, including disabled people, young people, foreign language speakers, ethnic community groups, LGBTQIA+ groups, specialist and community groups and expert bodies.
- A selection of delivered activities that have been informed by this policy and its associated plans.

We will undertake to assess delivered activities at least once every two years, and within the terms of this policy, to responsively adjust our approach to enhancing access to RBGE's Gardens and Associated Collections.