

The Access Pledge: Delivering supported work placements with purpose



THE CHALLENGE

National Museums NI (NMNI) regularly receives placement requests from schools, job centres, and charities supporting individuals with disabilities or additional support needs. Previously, they responded reactively leading to inconsistent outcomes and missed opportunities to engage meaningfully with their communities. NMNI needed a structured, sustainable way to offer placements aligned with their values and resources.

THE INITIATIVE

The Access Pledge is NMNI's commitment to proactively offer supported work placements for individuals facing barriers to employment.

- Each department commits to one placement per year
- Placements typically run for 4–6 weeks, flexibly scheduled
- Tasks are designed to suit a range of abilities (e.g. cataloguing, marketing, visitor services)
- Developed in partnership with support organisations, who assist with preparation, guidance, and in-placement support

This simple structure allows NMNI to respond confidently to placement requests and focus on quality over quantity.

External support organisations play an active role in delivering high-quality placements.

They:

- Work closely with NMNI to shape and plan each placement
- Provide background on the participant's goals and support needs
- Facilitate introductions and, when needed, initial interviews
- Deliver informal disability awareness training to staff
- Provide a support worker, where required, to accompany the participant, especially in the early sessions
- Help troubleshoot placements that needed adjustments or early exits

When these partnerships worked well, they enabled both the participant and the host team to build trust and confidence over time.

THE IMPACT

The Access Pledge has created meaningful change across participants, staff, and the wider community. Its effects reach beyond individual placements, helping to embed inclusive practice and strengthen NMNI's role as a welcoming, community-focused organisation.

- Participants have gained valuable hands-on experience, with several continuing as volunteers and progressing toward future employment opportunities.
- Employees report increased confidence and awareness in supporting colleagues and visitors with diverse needs, leading to more inclusive everyday practice.
- Community relationships have deepened, particularly with families and partner organisations, building trust and long-term collaboration.
- Strategic alignment: The initiative directly advances NMNI's goals around access, representation, and community connection, demonstrating inclusion in action rather than aspiration.



CONCLUSION

The Access Pledge has transformed how NMNI approaches inclusion, from reactive responses to intentional, impactful engagement. Key lessons learned from this approach include:

- Start small – pilot placements build trust and confidence
- Prioritise quality – fewer, well-supported placements create lasting impact
- Champion internally – success depends on the right staff, not just the right systems
- Build strong partnerships – honesty and clarity with support organisations are key
- Celebrate and share – success stories inspire wider buy-in and support

The Access Pledge isn't about volume, it's about visibility, inclusion, and values in action.