

## Potential collaboration: the Stanley Spencer Gallery & AACT's iMuse Programme

AACT is a small, volunteer-run communications charity. The Charity manages a programme, iMuse, which has the ultimate aim of setting-up a sustainable advisory service to help modest-sized museums become more accessible through the use of mobile devices. We are currently in the proof-of-concept phase, trying-out ways of increasing accessibility and engagement with the use of iPads and visitors' smartphones.

During 2012 iMuse has been working with two museums. We should like to run a third project in January-June 2013 and are currently looking for a museum which is willing to experiment in partnership with us and has staff and/or volunteers who can give some time to try things out with visitors.

Preliminary discussion with Gallery volunteers indicates that collaborating might be fruitful for us both. From iMuse's point of view, the Gallery is an almost perfect next project. As well as meeting our existing criteria, it brings in others for example interpretation of paintings for the visually impaired; dealing with space constraints; working with a wholly volunteer-led organisation.

We should like to suggest that a joint project be set-up with this outline

**Aim** To explore the potential for, and practicalities of, increasing visitor engagement with, and access to, the work of Stanley Spencer  
**by** introducing iPads into the Gallery for use by visitors. These would have various levels of information on them, changed in the light of visitor experience. For example, verbal descriptions of some paintings, photographs, video clips, audio and extended textual information could all be accommodated, with the visitor choosing what level or amount of information they would like.

**Timescale** 6 months from go-ahead

**Project management** Chrissy Rosenthal (Gallery) and Annette Haworth (AACT/iMuse) would act as joint project managers. The iMuse Programme already reports quarterly to the AACT Board, and we would suggest that Chrissy might attend these meetings too.

**Resources** AACT would provide equipment (iPads, headphones, security devices and some modest software) to a value of £2,000. This would be loaned to the Gallery for use by visitors. If the Gallery did not wish to continue its use at the end of the Project, the equipment would be returned to AACT. If the Gallery did wish to continue its use, AACT would be very happy for the equipment to remain as long as the Gallery undertook to keep in touch, so that AACT can continue to understand the potential of this approach.

Annette Haworth, Trustee and Volunteer  
Access-ability Communications Technology  
27<sup>th</sup> November 2012

## Further background

AACT (Access-ability Communications Technology, <http://aact.org.uk>) is a (very) small volunteer-run charity based in Reading. The Charity's main aim is to help people with communications difficulties through the use of IT. We do this by coordinating projects with other organisations and experts.

The iMuse Programme (<http://imuse.org.uk>) was launched in Autumn 2011 with the aim of encouraging smaller museums to become more accessible and engaging through the use of mobile devices (visitors' own smartphones and tablets such as iPads which may be loaned). The AACT Trustee Board acts as Project Board, meeting quarterly to review progress. The Programme Manager is Annette Haworth, trustee and volunteer.

The initial Programme timetable is at: [http://aact.org.uk/content/iMuse\\_initial\\_information.pdf](http://aact.org.uk/content/iMuse_initial_information.pdf). This split the Programme into two phases: Phase 1 to consist of three projects with three museums to try out various ideas (2012/13); Phase 2 to be a national advisory service from Spring [now mid-] 2013.

The first Phase 1 project ran in the first half of 2012 in the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL). With some part-funding from Reading Borough Council, the Vodafone Foundation and the Foyle Foundation, this became a broader project, trying-out a range of activities reported in 'Exploring Heritage with iMuse in Reading'. An analysis of one technique has just been published<sup>1</sup>. This project is continuing with a text-free iPad 'book' in the Ladybird publisher's-archive based 'Hunt for Meaning' exhibition, based around the work of the artist C. F. Tunnicliffe, RA. Currently we are working on recording exhibition text, particularly to help the visually impaired.

The second project started with a small trial of an iPad trail on the Five Days of the Ancient Olympics in the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology over the Olympics/Paralympics period, utilising both the Museum's and Open University material. This project has been extended to mid-2013 with iMuse joining-in the Museum's Arts Council funded 'Stories of the World' sequel, Ure Discovery, working with three local schools and a professional animator to interpret myths using objects in the gallery. AACT is providing extra funding and loaned iPads to the Project so that a special school may be involved.

iMuse is now seeking a third organisation which would like to work with it to try out mobile-based access in a project running January-June 2013 (see *The iMuse project – using apps to transform accessibility in museums*, <http://www.rsablogs.org.uk/2012/fellowship/imuse/>).

We are also just beginning the search for a larger organisation (probably a national museum) to host the proposed advisory service from later in 2013 and are currently working on a business model for this with the help of the RSA Fellowship Catalyst scheme.

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of Assistive Technologies 2012 vol 6 iss 4 *Using QR codes to aid accessibility in a museum*  
Annette Haworth, Access-ability Communications Technology, and Peter Williams, UCL.  
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/fwd.htm?id=aob&ini=aob&doi=10.1108/17549451211285771>