

MUSEUMS LIBRARIES ARCHIVES

The accessibility of museum, library and archive websites The MLA audit

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**MAI-Tagung 2005
Forschungsinstitut und Naturmuseum
Senckenberg, Frankfurt a.M.**

Why a web accessibility report for the museums, libraries and archives sector

“The trouble with technology is that it is not accessible.”
Leonardo Boff (1997)

Boff meant affordable, but we know that affordable ICT does not mean accessible ICT.

The report should give MLA and the sector a good understanding of the extent to which museum, library and archive websites are and can be made accessible.

Why a web accessibility report

- Museums, libraries and archives connect people to knowledge and information, creativity and inspiration. MLA's mission is to lead the drive to unlock this wealth, for everyone.
- Inspiring Learning for All, MLA's transformational framework for the sector is about museums, libraries and archives being learning organisations accessible to all (www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk).
- An accessible web site is an integral part of an accessible museum, library and archive.

Why a web accessibility report

Policy context

- Websites are covered by the service provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and are mentioned in the DRC Code of Practice (www.drc-gb.org/publicationsandreports/report.asp)
- E-Europe guidelines and E-government policies require that public sector websites meet WAI guidelines Level AA www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government/resources/handbook/html/usechecklist

Why a web accessibility report

Consolidating commitment to accessible technology

- 72% libraries taking part in the People's Network have installed assistive technology
- MLA advised the New Opportunities Fund to require NOF-digitise/EnrichUK projects to meet WAI guidelines level AA
- and on the production of guidance for developers of NOF Digitisation fund websites (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/interop-focus/gpg/>)

Why a web accessibility report

Gathering evidence for action

- The national MLA Disability Survey(2001) gave MLA substantial evidence about access and barriers to museums, libraries and archives for disabled people
- MLA responded to the findings, developing guidance and resources:
 - Disability Portfolio (National Information Forum Award 2004; translations into Welsh, Finnish, Portuguese)
 - Disability Experts data-base of disability auditors and trainers
 - Disability Checklist
 - Framework for the Future web learning resource for public libraries (2005)
 - (www.mla.gov.uk/action/learnacc/00access_03.asp)
- The 2001 survey provided little evidence on which to base strategic action for web accessibility.

Accessibility of museum, library and archive websites: the MLA audit



Helen Petrie, Neil King and
Fraser Hamilton

Centre for Human Computer
Interaction Design
City University

325 websites audited for accessibility

300 English sites:

100 Museums

100 Libraries

100 Archives

International comparison:

25 museums from around
the world

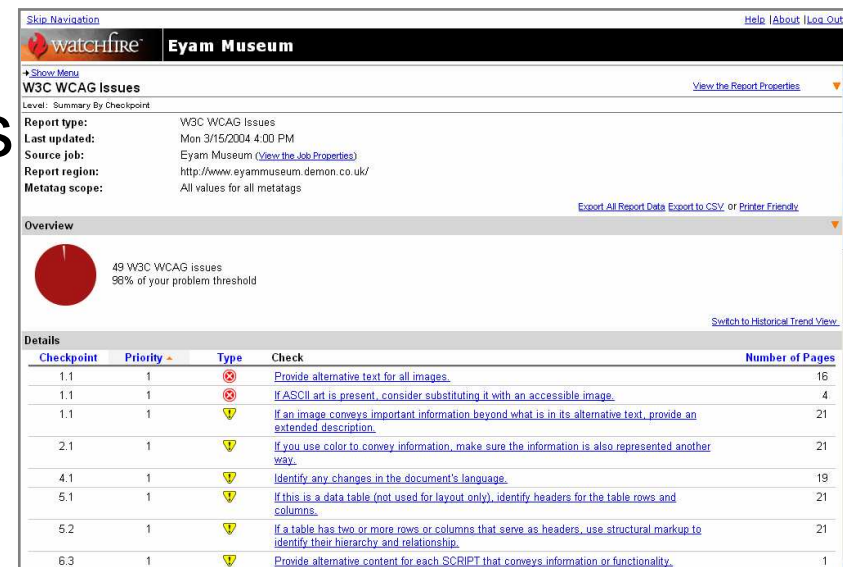
Testing against the WAI Guidelines

W3C Web Content
Accessibility Guidelines
(WCAG1)

Using WebXM
www.watchfire.com

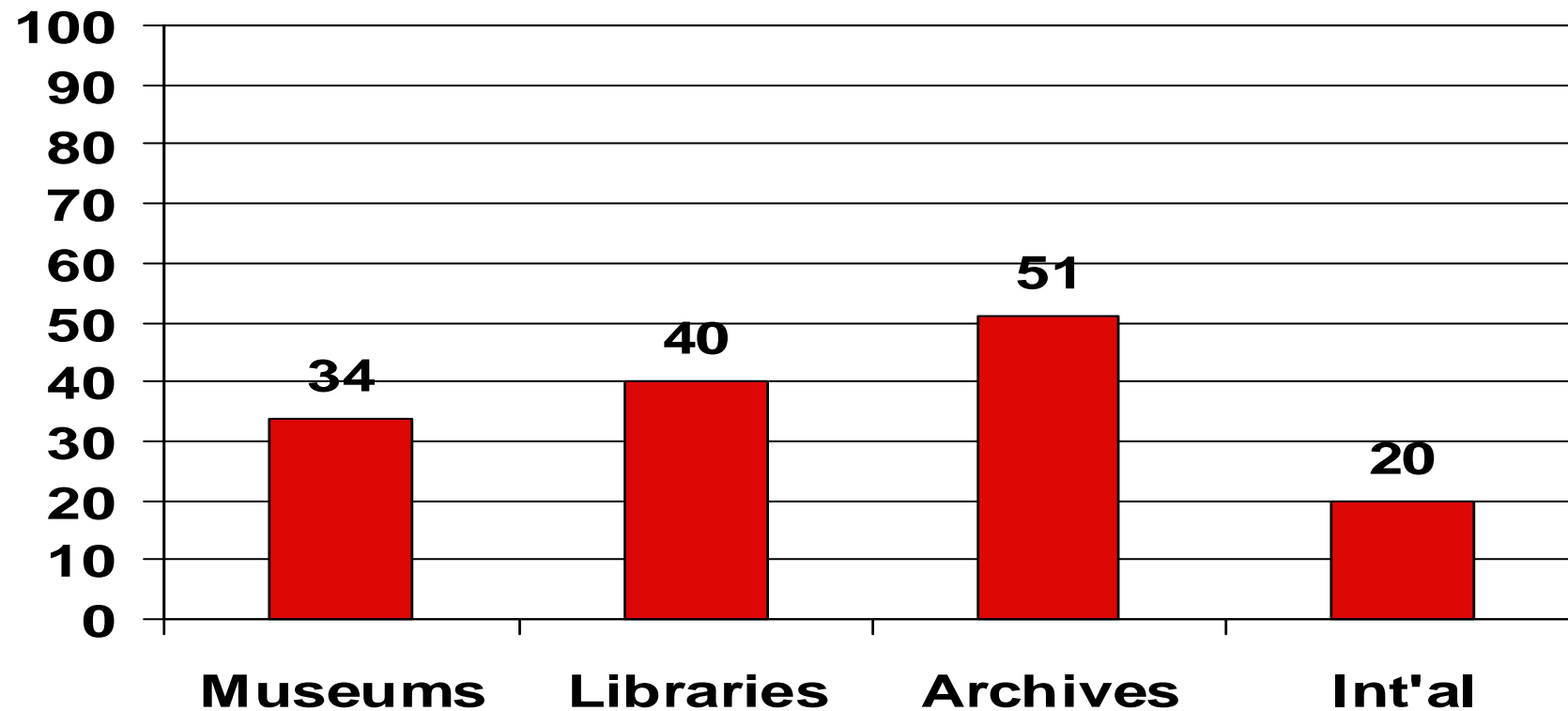
Automated tests

Tested homepages of the 325
sites

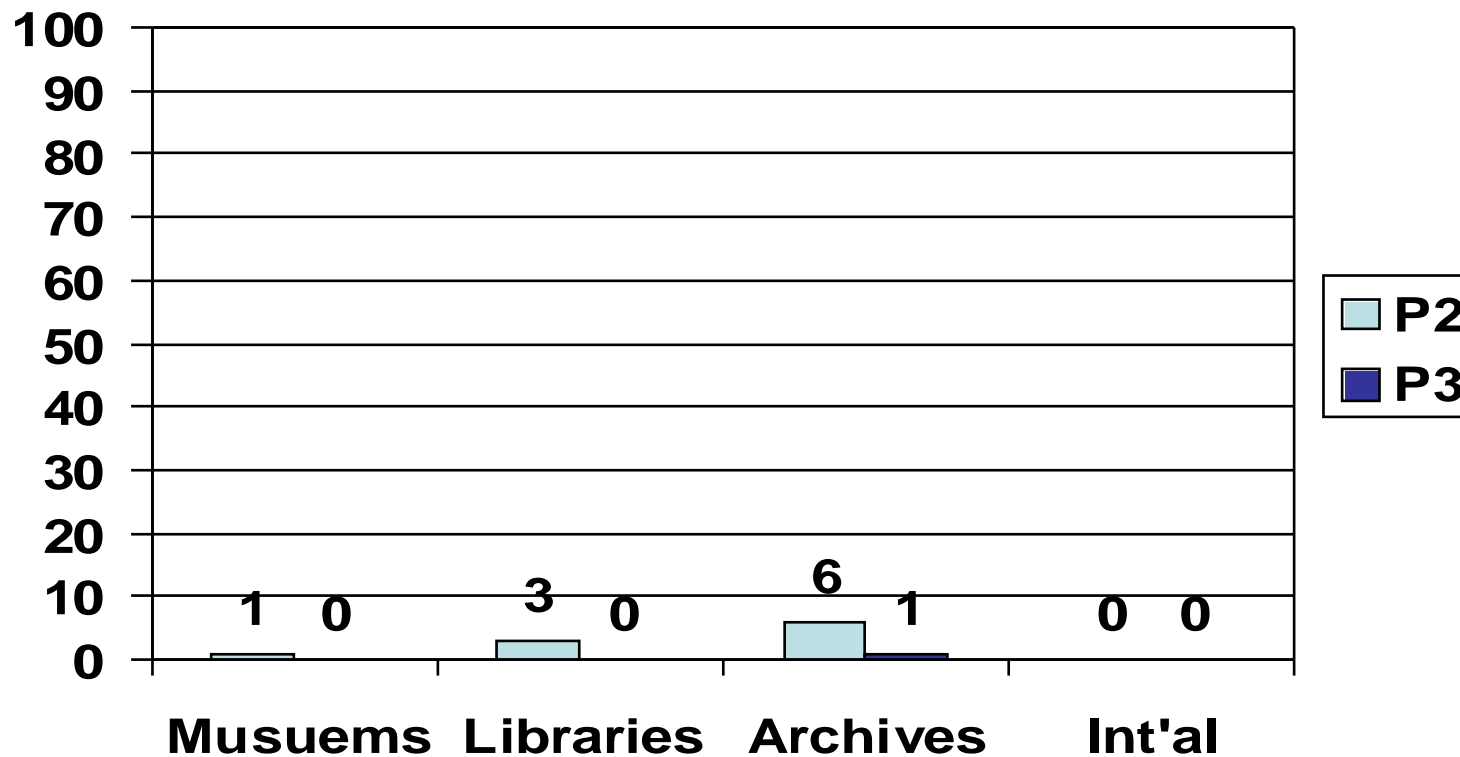


watchfire.com

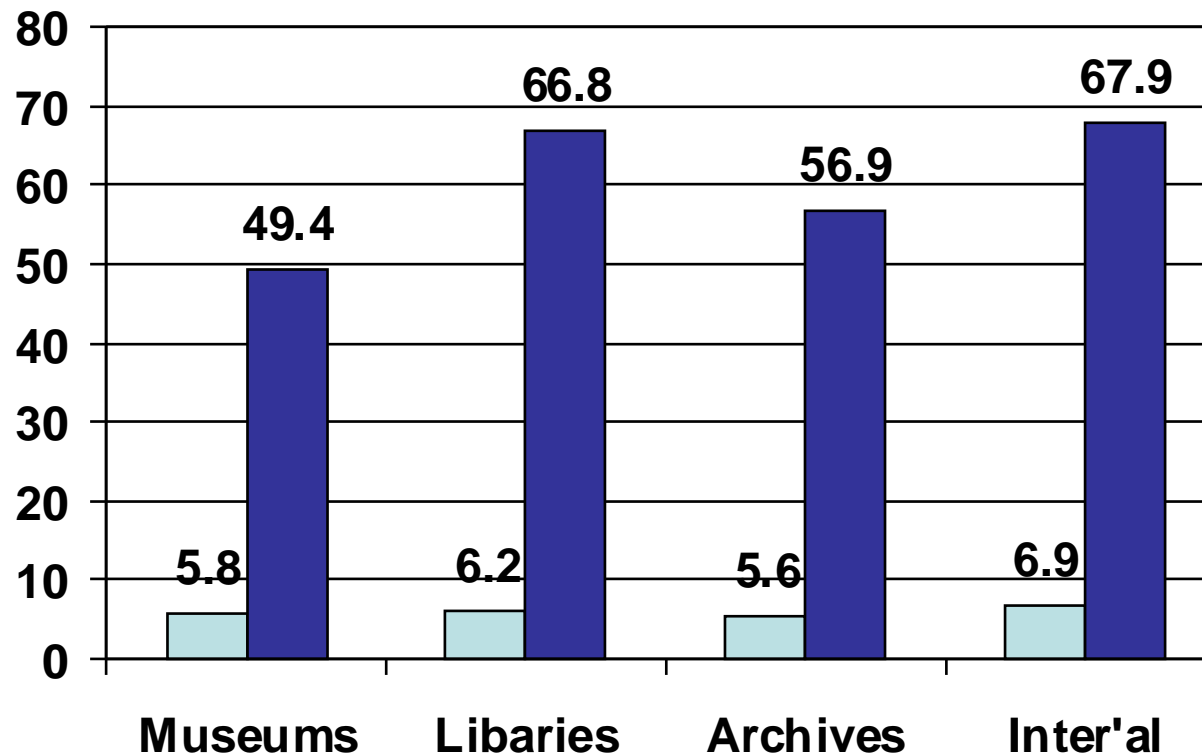
Percentage of Priority 1 compliant sites



Percentage of Priority 2 and 3 compliant sites



Problems: Designer and User Measures



User testing of 12 websites

15 Users: Blind, partially sighted, dyslexic

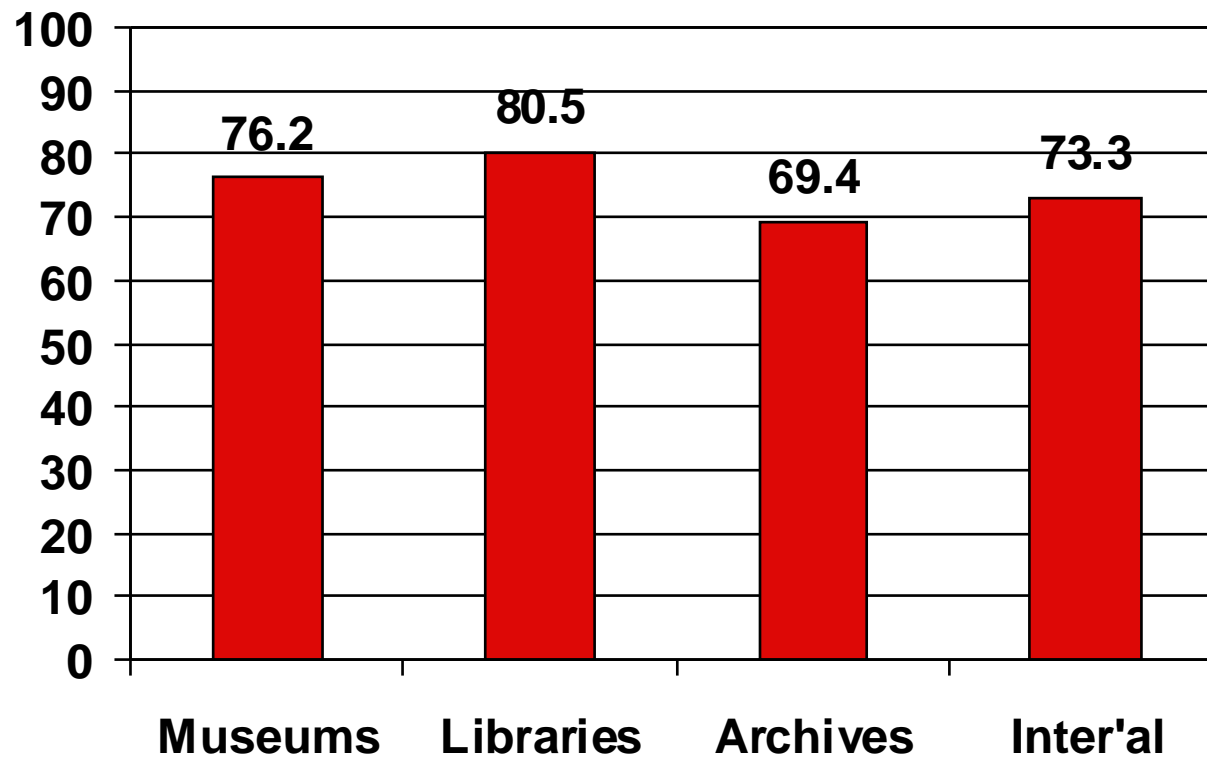
4 websites per user

2 representative tasks per website

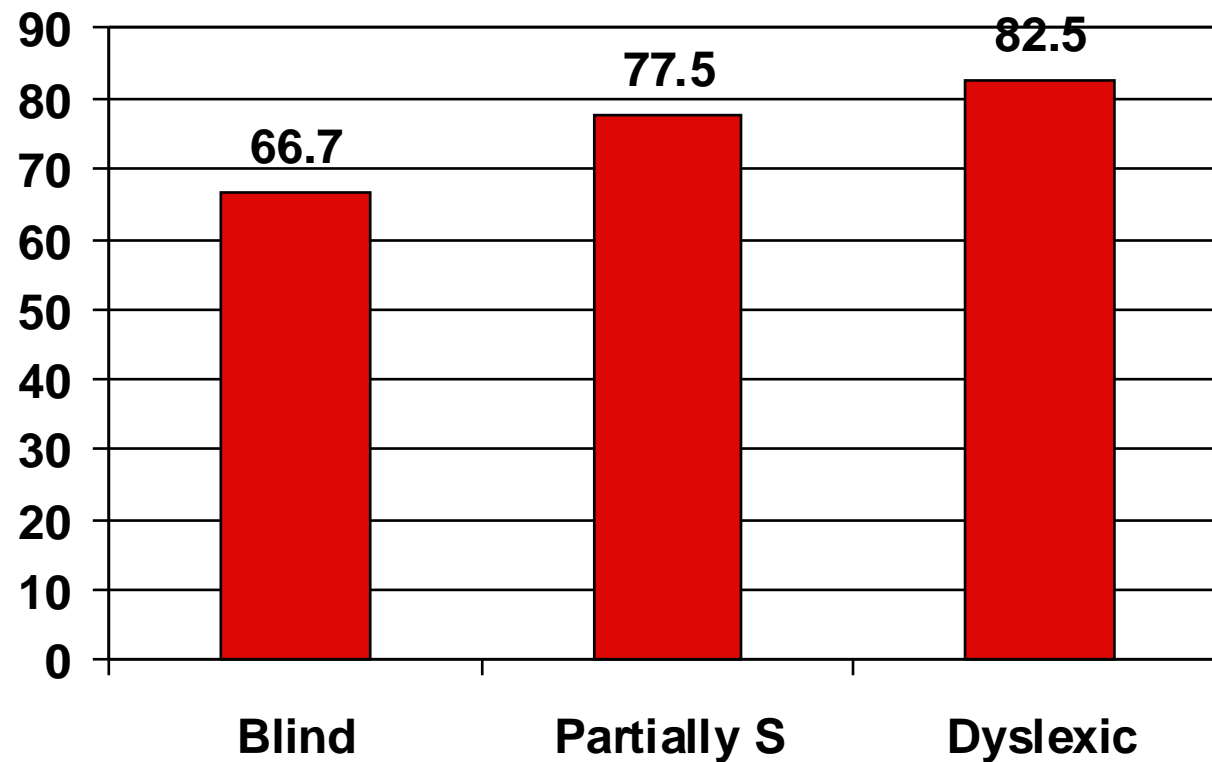
$15 \times 4 \times 2 = 120$ tasks

Data: Success rates, problems encountered, ease of use/navigation accessibility ratings, feeling “lost”

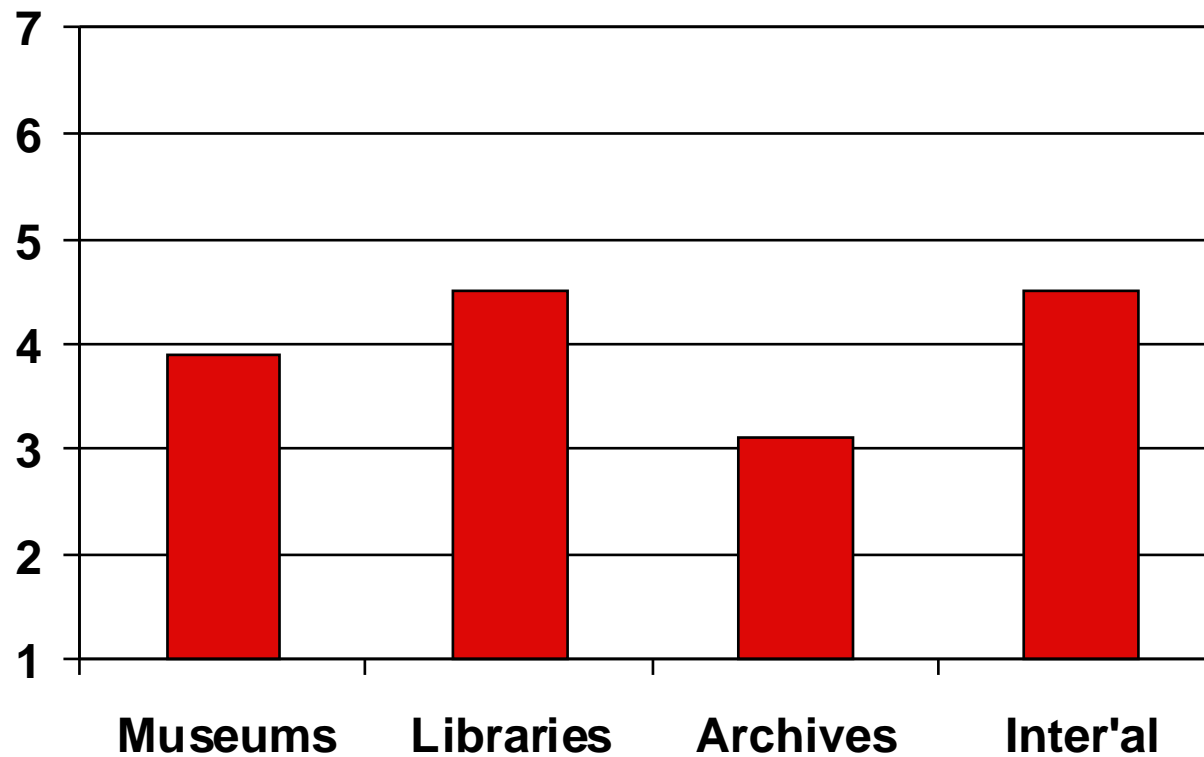
User testing: success rates (domains)



User testing: success rates (user groups)



Mean ease of use ratings



Key problems

1. Target of links not clearly identified (30)
2. Dense blocks of information - no headings (17)
3. Inappropriate use of colour, poor contrast (14)
4. Inconsistent navigation mechanisms (13)
5. Links not logically grouped, no skip navigation (10)

13 problems covered 68% of all user problems

Over half the problems relate to navigation and orientation

78% of problems relate to WCAG1 checkpoints

Conclusions

Basic level of technical accessibility is over twice what we found for the DRC Formal Investigation last year

DRC: 19% of sites passed Level A

MLA: 42% of sites passed Level A

but ... we should be aiming for Level AA, and few sites (now or then) are achieving that level

Conclusions

Disabled people, particularly blind people, are struggling with the web sites to complete very basic tasks

Blind User Panel members could only successfully complete 67% of tasks

56% of Panel member felt “lost” at least once on a typical website

Mean ease of use rating only 3.8 on a scale of 7

Conclusions

English museums fared considerably better than an international comparison group

Accessibility is not easy - very complex situation both technically and in terms of human needs

As we research this area more we can produce better guidance and the MLA sector can be at the forefront of this activity and lead the way on best practice

MLA's initial response to the report's recommendations

Museums, libraries and archives should:

- make web accessibility an integral part of the web development process
- audit current accessibility, develop policies and plans and involve disabled people
- make web accessibility a criterion in the web design brief.

MLA has always promoted a planned approach to access improvements and endorses the recommendations. Web accessibility is part of this process.

Planning brings access benefits

The MLA Disability Survey (2001) showed that among organisations who are 'high performers' in access (and scored on more than 85/125 indicators):

nine out of ten had carried out an access audit, compared with less than a third of 'low performers'.

they were ten times more likely to consult and more than twice as likely to have an access plan.

www.mal.gov.uk/action/leanracc/00access_03.asp

Planning helps meet the ‘anticipatory duty’ of the Disability Discrimination Act

The DDA Code of Practice cites:

- Access policies
- Access plans
- Audits
- Training
- Consultation with disabled people

as examples of what a court might use as evidence that a service provider meets this anticipatory duty.

Recommendations to MLA

One: promote guidance and good practice

MLA will:

- work with City University, the Museums Computer Group and Leicester University to promote good practice
- collect good practice case-studies for the MLA and Regional Agencies shared data-base
- make web accessibility a funding criterion for future web development schemes there might be
- hold the third Jodi Mattes Web Accessibility Awards in 2006

Recommendations to MLA

Two: build on and look beyond WAI guidelines

MLA is committed to promoting an understanding of web accessibility, which recognises the information requirements of all disabled people.

This includes BSL users, whose needs are not addressed or outside the scope of the WAI guidelines.

Recommendations to MLA

Recommendation 3: harness the unique contribution of mlas, presenting and interpreting museum, library and archive collections in accessible ways to specific groups of disabled people

Current good practice:

a handful of museum, library and archive websites provide:

- visual descriptions for visually impaired people
- web pages aimed at people with learning difficulties
accessible language, image communication and symbol systems
- and are there deaf archives?

What can be done

Applying existing expertise within and outside the sector

For more than a decade there have been:

- touch tours and visual descriptions of collections for visually impaired people
- events for people with learning difficulties
- events in BSL
- BSL, sub-titles and visual “audio description” for TV programmes film and video

As a sector we need to address the exciting and creative challenge presented by recommendation 3 by learning to apply this wealth of expertise to online museum, library and archive collections.

Ending with a light touch - the connectivity of haikus

"Fallen leaves-
Deep in the forest
I see a Buddha."

Santoka Taneda, Mountain Tasting

for "leaves" read "the wrong kind of leaves" or "access
barriers"

for "forest" read "the maze of the world wide web"

for "Buddha" read "accessible websites"

Addressing the recommendations is an important step
forward on the journey to web accessibility

Jodi Mattes Web Accessibility Awards 2005 for
museums, libraries and archives :

the winning museums

Excellence with low budgets

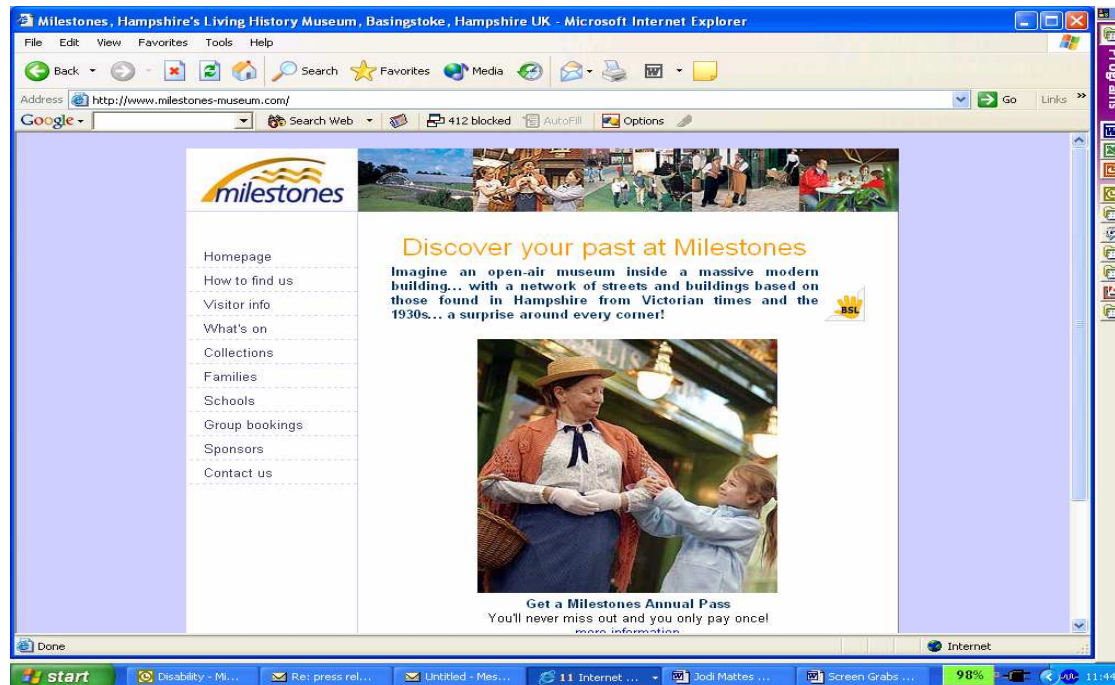
www.pewsey-heritage-centre.org.uk
Wiltshire County Council Museums Service



Commendation

For innovation with low budgets

www.milestones-museum.com
Hampshire County Council



Commendation

For technical excellence

www.imagine.org.uk
Tyne and Wear Museums



Read more

MLA audit report and Jodi Mattes web
accessibility awards
and

access for disabled people:

www.mla.gov.uk/action/learnacc/00access_03.asp