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Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums

**The evaluation of the impact of DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning
2003-2004: National/Regional Museum Education Partnerships
June 2004**

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Summary: Inspiration, identity, learning: the value of museums

S.1 The twelve projects

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills commissioned 12 projects through the Strategic Commissioning Programme 2003-2004: National/Regional Museum Education Partnership programme. These projects consisted of museum education partnerships between nation and regional museums, strengthened and enhanced by other organisations.

The DCMS/DfES programme has been evaluated by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester. The evaluation has focused on the impact on learning of the programme and has also reviewed issues of partnerships and project management. Where possible, the same research methods have been used as were used for the evaluation of the first phase of the Renaissance in the Regions programme. The focus of the evaluation for both programmes was the impact of learning, using the General Learning Outcomes (or GLO) approach previously developed by RCMG and MLA.

S.2 The character of the projects

The projects were multi-stranded, ambitious in scale and complexity. They were geographically dispersed across England. They were seized as an opportunity for innovation and experiment, through developing new audiences and partnerships, using existing partnerships in new ways, expanding the scope and scale of existing work and extending existing work into new areas.

S.3 Common themes, and shared convictions about the potential of museums

The twelve projects shared a number of themes. They worked towards community cohesion and social inclusion, and successfully targeted schools in some of the most deprived areas of England. Just under one third of the visits from schools in the DCMS/DfES programme were located in wards classified (by IMD2004) as the 20% most deprived, and where child poverty is highest (according to IADCI).

Museums worked with vulnerable individuals such as refugees and asylum seekers, teenage mothers, young people who are not in mainstream schools because of illness, and children who are at risk because of environmental and behavioural difficulties. Museums also engaged groups unaccustomed to using museums such as rural schools and hospital schools.

Many of the projects focused on inspiration, identity and the sense of self. The evaluation confirmed that museums are able to find ways to engage with children and young people across the social spectrum. Through empowering successful learning, museums in the DCMS/DfES programme enabled increased self-esteem and a higher sense of self-worth. This is valuable for all, but especially important for those who are disadvantaged or disempowered.

S.4 Partnerships and project management

The core of the DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning Museum Education Programme was partnership. The evaluation procedures enabled a review of the workings of these partnerships. Project management worked well (and very well) in some instances, less well in others. Different partnership models could be observed, with varying ways of developing projects. Some based their new work firmly on well-established ways of doing things, and others attempted new things. The recruitment and selection of new staff was essential, but not always straightforward.

S. 5 Critical success factors for projects

The evaluation looked at a small number of component strands (8) in detail, and also looked across the programme as a whole. From this, a number of critical success factors for projects have been identified. Projects had most chance of success where five elements were in place:

- Limited innovation
- Strong museum-related ideas
- Appropriate management
- Project workers with appropriate skills and experience
- Participants and partners needs are met

S.6 The impact of the DCMS/DfES programme on schools

There were 29,701 contacts with school pupils as part of the 12 projects from September 2003 to March 2004. Of these, 424 distinct museum visits, which involved 12,009 pupils, accompanied by 735 teachers and a further 1458 adults were the subject of detailed research, using questionnaires (using the same questionnaires as for the Renaissance in the Regions evaluation).

The schools

The majority of schools visiting museums as part of the DCMS/DfES scheme were primary schools (71% of the total). Secondary schools and colleges made up 18% of the total and there was a very low proportion of other schools such as special and private schools. When these findings are compared with those from the Renaissance in the Regions Education Programme evaluation it can be seen that the DCMS/DfES programme reached a higher proportion of secondary schools (18% of the total compared with 13%).

The teachers

The majority of teachers said that museums were either very important (47%) or important (47%) to their teaching. 66% of teachers said that this the first time they had visited this museum with a class, (compared with 47% of new users in the Renaissance research) and 68% of teachers were very satisfied and a further 28% were satisfied with their experience.

The pupils

9415 completed pupil questionnaires (Forms B) were returned to RCMG (approximately 63% of the pupils whose teachers completed their own questionnaires).

- 78% of pupils were Key Stage 2 and below (boys 48% and girls 50%)
- 21% of pupils were Key Stage 3 and above (boys 42% and girls 56%)

The themes that teachers used

85% of the teachers visiting museums agreed that their visit was directly linked to the curriculum. Teachers (the majority of whom were primary teachers) were working in the museums on the following subject areas:

- History (51%),
- Science/Technology (26%)
- Art (18%)
- With much smaller proportions for other subjects

The proportion of teachers working on science-based themes is very high, compared with the Renaissance evaluation. These teachers are the least confident about using museums, and the least likely to use them in a broad-based way.

S.7 The five Generic Learning Outcomes

The Generic Learning Outcomes approach was used to focus the evaluation, to structure research tools and to analyse and interpret the data.

The teachers' views

Teachers completing questionnaires were asked how important they considered each of the five generic learning outcomes to be. Each GLO was rated separately on a scale from 'very important' to 'not at all important'. Teachers classified the GLOs as 'very important' as follows:

Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity	79%*
Knowledge and Understanding	63%
Attitudes and Values	55%
Action, Behaviour, Progression	50%
Skills	46%

*(I.e. 79% of those teachers completing questionnaires rated EIC as 'very important')

Combining the numbers of teachers ticking 'very important' and 'important' in the case of both Enjoyment, inspiration, creativity and Knowledge and understanding, it emerges that 97% of teachers tick either of these categories in both cases. Clearly both these GLOs are of very high importance to all teachers. Other outcomes seem less important for teachers. There were only minor differences between teachers of primary and secondary pupils. There were more significant differences according to the themes on which teachers were working.

The pupils' views

Pupils were very positive about their museum experience, and what they felt they had learnt. In fact, cross-tabulations show that they were more positive than their teachers.

Pupils enjoyed and were inspired by their museum experience:

91% of KS2 and below pupils agreed	<i>'I enjoyed today's visit'</i>
64% of KS3 and above pupils agreed	<i>'A visit to the museum / gallery makes school work more inspiring'</i>

When pupils at KS2 and below were asked if they had learnt some interesting new things, 90% of pupils agreed with this. There were a number of questions about knowledge and understanding for the older pupils:

89% of KS3 and above pupils agreed	<i>'I discovered some interesting things from the visit today'</i>
77% of KS3 and above pupils agreed	<i>'The visit has given me a better understanding of the subject'</i>
77% of KS3 and above pupils agreed	<i>'Today's visit has given me lots to think about'</i>
74% of KS3 and above pupils agreed	<i>'I could make sense of most of the things we saw and did at the museum'</i>

When asked whether they found the museums they visited exciting places, 83% of the younger pupils agreed with this statement, and 83% agreed that a visit was useful for school-work. 86% of the older students thought that museums were good places to learn in different ways from school.

There was strong agreement about the potential of the pupils' learning for the future:

73% of KS2 and below pupils agreed	<i>'The visit has made me want to find out more'</i>
71% of KS2 and below pupils agreed	<i>'Visiting has given me lots of ideas for things I could do'</i>
55% of KS3 and above pupils agreed	<i>'I would come again'</i>

The older pupils were asked about their view of the museum as a place where new skills can be picked up, and 70% agreed that it was useful for this.

The research shows that teachers are not maximising the outcomes of museum use. The research also identified a number of barriers for teachers.

S.8 The impact of the DCMS/DfES programme - the use of museums by communities

There were 34,147 contacts with participants in community events, workshops and activities in the 12 DCMS/DfES projects between August 2003 and March 2004. In addition, there were 1609 contacts with community workers who facilitated these events, and also 1748 contacts with other participants who benefited from the projects more indirectly.

A small number of learning outcomes were suggested by DCMS/DfES as appropriate for communities. These focused on attitudes to museums and the experience they offer. The case-studies provide examples of how the involvement with museums can sometimes be much more substantial than might be expected in terms of learning outcomes, especially when museums are working with community groups who are engaged in activities that focus mainly on learning.

The research found strong examples of the value of museums to communities, especially vulnerable and/or new communities. Museums can provide links between old familiar worlds and new worlds by using collections to compare the familiar and the unfamiliar across cultures. Museums can establish a sense of place and have the potential to enable a broadening of identity. A number of barriers to community use were identified.

S.9 The impact of the DCMS/DfES programme on museums

While this was not the main focus of the evaluation, considerable new resources were produced during the programme and a number of examples were found of factors that suggest the potential for future impact of the programme.

S.10 Key issues for the future

A number of key issues have emerged from the extensive and deep evidence on which the report is based.

Learning in museums – increased strategic focus

The potential for museum-based learning is shown very clearly in this research. The challenge now is to find the structures and the means to use this power more effectively and more consistently.

Some improvements to the overall programme design

The research uncovered matters concerning the purpose, parameters and timescale of the DCMS/DfES programme that could be improved in future programmes.

Museums and schools

Teachers' satisfaction levels and confidence levels following museum use could be improved. The rates are consistently lower than was found in the Renaissance research. Timescales for the programme may have affected teachers' planning.

There is evidence that teachers are underestimating the power of museums to stimulate learning and to provoke learning in some of the more intangible dimensions of learning. Pupils are consistently more positive about their learning than teachers are.

Teachers working on science-based themes were consistently less confident about the way they used the museum – their work was narrower in compass and they were less confident of success. There are opportunities here for museums to help.

Museums and communities

Community outreach work is still undeveloped; however, the work observed as part of this evaluation shows how very effective work with communities, especially vulnerable communities, can be. An engagement with communities is a very significant and important part of the work of museums, but it has to be planned for in the long term, and in acknowledgement of the issues.

Museums as resources where schools struggle – working with community organisations

Museums in partnership with community organisations, such as hospital schools, language centres and centres for children and young people at risk, can offer highly successful alternative approaches to learning, providing different routes to learning for these children and young people. This is a strength that can complement the work of schools and colleges, but as yet the structures are not in place to enable this strength to be exploited.

Issues for museums

Three large long-term and deeply embedded matters stand out as major issues for museums to consider when seeking to move forward with programmes such as these. These issues concern capacity, organisational culture and the expectations of audiences and partners.

S.11 The social value of museums

While museums are changing, becoming more in tune with contemporary issues and more aware of their social potential, the DCMS/DfES programme shows how the social value of museums can be enhanced far beyond what is currently expected. This research provides examples of the extraordinary power of museums and their collections, but also shows clearly some of the challenges that museums face in realising this power.