

Minutes of the Collaborative Working Group 8 February 2006, MLA, Victoria House

Attendees:

Sue Wilkinson – Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
David Fleming – National Museum Directors' Conference
Mark Taylor – Museums Association
Chris White – Local Government Association
Bill Ferris – Association of Independent Museums
Karen Brookfield – The Heritage Lottery Fund
Alec Coles – Renaissance Hub Museums Representative

DCMS

Paul Kirkman – DCMS (Chair)
Paul Barnes- DCMS
Ben Cowell- DCMS
Hillary Bauer- DCMS
Keith Nichol – DCMS
Ian Jenkins – DCMS
Lindsey Pickles – DCMS
Gemma Gaines - DCMS

Independent observers:

Saira Law – Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
Fiona Macalister – The National Trust

Introductions

1. Apologies for absence: David Lammy

National strategy: Purpose

2. The collaborative Working Group considered what the purpose of the group should be. There was strong support for the idea of producing a national strategy for museums.

3. There was an understanding that the strategy should set common goals to define how museums and the sector want to be in the 21st Century. This included concepts of: quality of public service; what the

public were entitled to expect from their museums; a countrywide entitlement to that service that was not homogenised, and possibly a set of priorities.

4. It was felt that a strategy should encompass a clearer statement of the public value of museums. This included defining the potential of what museums could really achieve in the future, with the right support.

5. The Group considered that, in drafting a Strategy, it would be important to work with other fora that were already engaged in specific issues (e.g. the Museums Association and Collections for the Future; Renaissance and so on). The role of the Group would be to knit together such initiatives and utilise existing networks to ensure more joined-up working and wider sector buy-in. The strategy would perhaps focus on no more than six key elements.

6. The diversity of the sector, from national to local charitable museums, needed to be reflected in the strategy. While there would be a need from common goals, the methods of delivery across the sector would be different. However, it was noted that there was, at present, no joined-up target framework for National Museums, Renaissance hubs, local authorities and university museums.

7. It was argued that the strategy should be outward facing, stressing the benefits of Museums to the wider cultural, education and social policy agendas. It should also inform NDPB Funding Agreements, Renaissance priorities post 2008, and shared priorities between National and Local Government, including Local Area Agreements. A national strategy would, in particular, make it easier to raise the profile of museum funding within local authorities. However, the strategy would need to avoid boxing bodies that fund Museums, especially discretionary funders such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, into a strict set of nationally deduced funding priorities.

8. In conclusion, the Group agreed that it was very timely to be considering developing a strategy that embraced working in partnership. There was now a clear opportunity, that could not have been grasped even a few years ago, to develop an understood vision of excellence, with goals and shared priorities across the sector. It was an opportunity that needed to be grasped.

9. It was agreed that DCMS (Paul Barnes and Paul Kirkman) would be the authors of a draft text, with regular input from members of the Group. The document would be based on detailed discussions at future

meetings and individuals would be asked to contribute and improve the text at various stages during the process.

Practicalities

10. There was agreement that the Museum Association Conference (23-25 October 2006) should be utilised to promote the strategy. It was hoped that a meaningful first draft could be produced by June, with wide stakeholder consultation on a draft text in July. It was thought that the Museum Association Conference would be part of an extended phase of consultation - perhaps presenting a near final draft - to ensure there as wide a stakeholder buy-in as possible. The document could then be finalised by the late autumn of 2006.

11. The issue of dissenting voices was discussed and it was agreed that it would be important that the strategy, and its language, was addressed at those that needed to be won over. It was also agreed that DCMS should consider how the start of this process and the existence of the Group should be announced and its on-going work communicated. **Action Point: DCMS to prepare stakeholder management plan.**

Issues

12. It was felt that the strategy had to start with a strong section setting out the vision for the sector. It had to be persuasive on the difference that museums could, and do, make and what excellence looked like. Other high level issues that needed addressing included: the image of the sector; vertical and horizontal linkages across the sector (e.g. between local authority museum services); and funding realities.

13. The thematic issues that needed to be addressed in the strategy included:

Usage

14. Usage included not just visitors, but all forms of public engagement (e.g. dissemination of knowledge to the public). Addressing the needs of non-users, or under-represented sections of the community, and ensuring an engaging experience for users were all considered to be important issues.

15. The public's expectation of museums needed to be analysed. The Group also felt that usage would need to touch on the willingness of

museums to embrace organisational change and be better advocates for what they currently deliver. It was agreed that the strategy would need to drill down to the specifics of how museums address usage issues.

Collections

16. The strategy would need a chapter on collections, the USP of museums. This would embrace issues around: collections care; the disposal issue; and linkages to research and learning.

Workforce development

17. There would need to be a chapter on workforce development. Topics, that the group thought might be addressed here included: encouraging the widest possible pool of talent to enter the profession; skills development within the workforce; the value of volunteering; and capturing why people should want to enjoy working in museums as a professional public service.

Learning

18. Learning was likely to be a further thematic section. The Group noted that the current focus was principally on primary and secondary education and formal learning. It was felt that this should be expanded to include all forms of lifelong learning, including family learning, adult education, older people and volunteers.

Next meetings

19. It was decided that the group should meet again in March, April and May. Paul Barnes would seek to arrange suitable meeting dates and requested that all concerned show some flexibility in terms of their pre-existing diary commitments. **Action Point: All.**

DCMS Secretariat
16 February 2006

These minutes were agreed at the 13 March meeting.