



Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life

The Value of Museums

Contents

	page
Foreword by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State, DCMS	3
Personal Introduction by Estelle Morris, Arts Minister	4
Executive Summary	6
Introduction: The Value of Museums	10
Issue 1: Collections and Their Uses	14
Issue 2: Learning and Research	19
Issue 3: Careers, Training and Leadership	24
Issue 4: Coherence and Advocacy	28
Issue 5: Partnership and Measuring Value	31
Conclusion	34
Annex	35
Acronyms	36
Acknowledgements	36

Foreword by Tessa Jowell

Museums and galleries tell the story of this nation, its people and the whole of humanity. It is impossible to imagine how else that story could be told, or what the landscape of Britain would look like without them.

The story is told to children through education; it is told to adults through the most modern teaching methods. It is conserved by holding together the great collections.

But perhaps most importantly, it is interpreted through scholarship and research. Teaching, education and scholarship, available to all: the values of the Enlightenment kept alive for each generation.

Museums and galleries are of course major employers and an important part of the economy.

But for me, and the Government, they are something much more: a way for us all to see our place in the world. This is all the more important as society changes, and new values of nationality and community emerge. The fixed points of history and heritage have an even greater meaning as our world becomes smaller, and our values develop.

This paper sets out some of the issues that we need to consider, if museums are to continue to play this role, this century, that they have played in the past.

Now we want your views, your ideas and your comments.



TESSA JOWELL
Secretary of State

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Personal Introduction by Estelle Morris

I can more or less remember my first visit to a museum. It would have been some time in the early fifties. Probably a family outing to one of the museums and galleries in Manchester which these days some would call 'visitor attractions', but then were just 'the museums'.

There were far fewer of them then, of course. And my memory is of an imposing place with high ceilings, polished woodblock floors and a faint aroma of Brasso and Mansion polish. And the collection itself? I am sure I saw much that impressed me but, to tell the truth, individual pieces are lost in the mists of my memory. It was the institution itself that stuck most firmly in my mind. Even to my childish eyes, I could see it was something out of the ordinary. Something important.

Five decades on, I now look at museums and galleries through the prism of 20 years working in education, 25 years in public life, and 20 months as Arts Minister, responsible for the museums sector.

In some ways, my experience as Arts Minister has confirmed what I already sensed to be true. Museums are as important to our quality of life as any of the public services, and their purpose and progress deserve more public debate than they have sometimes received.

The sheer number – and range – of collections available to the public is staggering. At their best, our museums and galleries are acclaimed internationally. At all levels they are blessed with dedicated and expert people looking after them, and have real links with their local communities within which they play an economic, educational and social role. In short, they hold the record of our history, helping us to make sense of the present by throwing light on the past. Few other institutions can do that in quite the same way.

There's something for all generations too. As we go through life, our tastes and preoccupations change, and it is to the credit of our best museums that the same institution that delighted us as a child can have something – and something different – to say to us in middle age.

Many of the recently established museums have been built around the declining industries of our time. The story of these industries – what they contributed to the country and the world, and what they meant to the lives of those who depended upon them, used to be passed down through the generations by word of mouth. But when the closure of the industries led to the dismantling of the communities, the people turned to museums to ensure that their story would continue to be told.

So museums are precious to us. Their independence and diversity make them a vital force – no politician should ever be able to exert an influence over how our history, and the present, are interpreted for those who come after us. Our role is – and should be – one of protection and support, but also as a focus from time to time for debate about what the public should expect from the sector.

This paper looks at the contribution that museums and galleries can – and should – make to a modern democracy. It is not the whole story, of course, only a snapshot of the issues. It has been too long since we led such a debate.

We in Government are passionate about the importance of our cultural heritage, and its place in the wider world. I believe that museums and galleries are at the heart of this. What follows begins that debate.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Estelle Morris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ESTELLE MORRIS
Arts Minister

Executive Summary

Museums¹ are the way we connect our past with our present and our future.

Museums are centres of knowledge, with a clear – and growing – role as educators. They support the creative industries. They act as a powerful engine for regeneration, and are a primary reason why overseas visitors come to this country. Their impact on the economy, and the tangible effect they have on the imagination and spirit of the people who visit them, is enormous. Their international reputation for excellence is well justified.

Museums are rightly a source of pride for us all. And for us, the Government, they are something more – a means of helping citizens understand their place in the world and its heritage.

This paper celebrates their achievement, but does not stop there. Its purpose is rather to look at what aspects of England's² museums need to be addressed to face the challenges of the 21st century.

The public realm

Museums, regardless of how they are funded, are at the heart of what we call 'the public realm'. The public realm is the shared space – and the network of public institutions and practices – over which all citizens have ownership, and which is held in trust by Government in all forms and at all levels. Museums are central to this, because they are part of the wealth we all hold in common.

Museums, identity and citizenship

Museums have always satisfied a very human need: to create a permanent record of how people have lived, and what they have achieved, across what we have come to recognise is an interdependent world. Globalisation has changed the rate and pace of change, and connects the local to the global. Within this context, museums are spaces where people can explore personal beliefs in amongst universal truths. In short, they can show how events and beliefs from the past shape people's experience of the present, and help create a sense of identity. Because cultural identity in the 21st century is not necessarily defined by national borders.

There is a 'public benefit' too. Public benefit has been a key aspect for museums for more than 300 years but the difference these days, of course, is that the definition of 'citizenship', which is tied to it, has evolved. We are more inclusive, and less elitist, more diverse and less deferential. There is a

Definitions:

¹ This document uses the term "museums" to substitute for museums and galleries. It focuses on those museums (and galleries) that have collections, buildings and staff, and whose purpose is to make those collections accessible to the public. It is written to reflect the position of museums in England, whether funded by central government or local government, as well as university museums and independent museums. When the "sector" or "the museums sector" is referred to, it is this range of museums and galleries that is being encompassed.

² Museums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are subject to different arrangements for their support and direction, although in a number of important ways they remain part of a UK wide network. They, and their governing bodies, may wish to consider issues that this document raises. Those partnerships that already exist between museums in different parts of the UK should be developed and fresh partnerships encouraged.

different balance of rights and responsibilities, and a relationship between Government and the citizen that is – for the first time – governed by clear lines of accountability.

Consequently the context in which the public enjoys and makes use of museums – their collections, knowledge and buildings – has altered. Today people have different expectations, preferences and needs. Their cultural identity is perceived as more difficult to define and pin down, they are in large measure more demanding about the experiences they seek.

Museums' relationships with the public are consequently transformed.

So it is timely to look again at some of the other fundamental principles of these institutions, and to see how comfortably they fit within the public realm today. We want to begin a debate about the areas of greatest challenge, and try to pick out ways that Government and the museums sector can respond.

Collections and their uses

Collections are at the heart of all that museums do, but they need to remain dynamic resources. They should, and in many cases do, reflect the vitality, the uniqueness and the diversity of contemporary communities and their lives.

The economic reality of collecting in the 21st century, however, means that ways of collecting must adapt if museums are to maintain this momentum. Collaborations on scholarship and purchasing are becoming more commonplace. This could go further, with more – and more innovative – sharing of collections. In this way, the concept of national collections changes too. The internet holds the greatest potential here, and museums must look at ways of using its potential to build understanding of collections, cutting across institutional (and national) boundaries.

In this new century, it will be more important than ever for museums to create access to their collections. This may redefine conventional questions of ownership. The debate about ownership of collections is a national and an international one.

Learning and research

Museums can help people to learn at every stage of their lives. Links with schools are already well-established. This can be taken further when parts of collections – and the expertise that goes with them – are taken into schools or, to take this further, into residential homes, hospitals or prisons. The Government sees the continuation, and strengthening, of this trend as a priority for museums.

The success of all this, of course, depends upon a bedrock of high quality research and scholarship in each institution. Unsurprisingly, the picture is not consistent across the sector. But whilst it is for individual institutions to negotiate the balance of learning and research, strengthening research and the promotion of learning must be key elements in partnership working.

The Government wants to work with museums to help bring about a healthy research culture, and to see whether funding and evaluation can be enhanced through closer links with the Higher and Further Education sectors.

Careers, training and leadership

The success of museums – their collections, scholarship and initiatives to broaden access – depends upon the people working within them at every level, including volunteers. A committed and focused workforce can help make museums vital, open, accessible and exciting places to be.

There are issues surrounding both training and career development in the sector, however. In the same way that the Government wants to see collections and scholarship shared within the museums community, so there should be scope for more staff mobility between institutions, and a greater emphasis on professional development through secondment and internships. Museum staff should also have the benefit of access to bodies able to advise on – and provide – training.

Of concern is the lack of diversity in the sector. If museums are to become – and remain – the ‘vital and open’ places we want, it is essential that currently under-represented groups become fully integrated into the workforce at all levels.

These building blocks – career development, training and diversity – will be essential if the museums world is to stimulate a pool of potential leaders to develop the sector into the 21st century.

Coherence and advocacy

Strong leadership is important. The way the sector has evolved – particularly in terms of its funding and governance – means that it can appear fragmented and disparate. Perhaps museums would prosper more if they found a way to present a more unified front, with a common direction and purpose. The Government would welcome a debate with the sector around whether current structures impede the sector from developing a shared national strategy for themselves and their publics. There could be value in debating whether structures within which museums operate prevent delivery at national, regional or local level, and what options should be considered, including that of a unitary funding council.

This debate could be informed by a fresh look at funding models in other European countries.

For the contributions of the sector to be recognised – socially, economically, politically and culturally – there has to be coherence and cohesion as well as vision.

Partnerships and measuring value

Much work towards this coherence has already been done, so museums will not be coming to this from a standing start. Museums working together – locally and nationally – are already an important part of our cultural landscape. Partnerships should continue to be part of the museums landscape in the future.

New partnerships should emerge too. And these should not be confined to institutions within the UK. The enlarged EU provides an opportunity for developing stronger and perhaps more strategic alliances. In the longer term, shared ownership and use of collections could be built up between museums, not just in different countries, but in different continents too.

The final piece in the jigsaw is, in some ways, the hardest to bring about. It is important to acknowledge the intrinsic value of culture. But how do we measure and understand cultural value? There needs to be

consensus on what constitutes quality, and what a future evidence base should consist of. It is only by arriving at this that Government – working with those in the sector- can authoritatively measure the impact that is being made and make the case for continuing public investment.

Next steps

Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life is a consultation paper. It is centred around the 13 questions dispersed throughout the paper and summarised again at the back in the Annex.

In the pages that follow, key challenges and opportunities facing England's museums are identified and suggestions made for positive change. These provide a context for the questions.

Government is not the only, or even the main, driver for the changes we will be discussing, and part of the challenge will be to identify and clarify responsibilities between Government, bodies such as the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), governing authorities and the museums themselves.

The responses to this consultation will form the basis of a report containing strategic directions and specific policy intentions. These in turn will feed into a DCMS delivery plan explaining how this Department will work with its sponsored bodies – and wider stakeholders – to tackle the emerging priorities.

Responses to this paper – and other comments on the role of museums in the 21st century should be sent by 30 June 2005 to:

Lindsey Pickles
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Telephone: 020 7211 6126

E-mail: lindsey.pickles@culture.gsi.gov.uk

Introduction: The Value of Museums

1. Museums and galleries are an essential part of the work of any Government that wants to help its citizens understand themselves, their communities and their place in the world.
2. *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life* recognises and celebrates the importance and achievements of museums in the 21st century while identifying some of the challenges that face them. Our purpose is to encourage a debate about museums, to ensure that they can properly occupy their place in what is described here as ‘the public realm’ – that shared space which we own and which is held in trust for citizens by Government and public institutions.
3. Although this paper is written for museums in England, it is not solely aimed at the museums sector. It is for everyone who has an interest in the museum world. It puts forward ideas, asks questions, and explores those areas where Government believes the greatest challenges lie. These areas are neither comprehensive nor exclusive, but we believe they are central to the future strength of our museums.

Museums and the public realm

4. Museums hold and care for collections. They can excite and inspire us and encourage us to develop our imagination. Museums are centres of knowledge and powerful educators for millions, from the youngest of school children to the most advanced students. They feed the creative industries which is the fastest growing economic and employment sector in the UK. The quality and diversity of England’s museums is one of the primary reasons why people visit this country – six out of the top ten visitor attractions for visits in the United Kingdom are museums. They are a vital part of our nation’s economy in other ways too, as employers, educators, trainers, motivators and creative industries in their own right. Museums can drive regeneration in cities and communities, from Tate Modern in Southwark and the Lowry in Salford to the Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens in the North East.
5. For maintaining and renewing these cultural assets alone museums deserve public support and funding, but their importance goes beyond this. Museums form part of the wealth we all hold in common as individuals, as communities and as a nation. Furthermore this wealth stretches beyond the boundaries of the nation, to all those who come to use and study collections in museums.
6. Museums have a different relationship to Government from many areas of public life. The reasons for this are largely historical but also reflect Government’s desire not to interfere with detailed aspects of how museums are run. But whether museums are national, regional, local, independent or university based, run by paid or voluntary staff, they all make a vital contribution to the public realm. They are an essential part of the infrastructure of the kind of society of opportunity that this Government is trying to create. So while they should continue to explore opportunities for diversifying their funding through private, foundation and commercial sources, many of our principal museums will therefore continue to enjoy funding from central or local government towards the cost of their core activities.

Museums and identity

7. Every country and every community needs to know about its past to help it make sense of the present. The depth of people's need to relate to their past, and to work out and define their place in the world, is evidenced by contemporary world events. To understand why there was such outcry when the ancient Bamiyan Buddhas were demolished in Afghanistan in 2001 one only has to think about the connections made between these treasures and Afghanistan's culture, history and identity, but equally how the loss was felt internationally, because of their perceived universal importance. To understand the present, people want to know about the past, other peoples and other places and they often do this through material things. So museums and their collections have a role in showing how events and beliefs have helped shape contemporary experience.
8. Globalisation has transformed the world in which we all live. It brings new opportunities – electronic information, cultural diversity, ease of travel and re-location – all of which can lead to the dispersal of established communities and traditions. However, its paradoxical effect has been that of creating a greater need for local or community roots and values. This enhances the role of museums. By virtue of their public focus and their varied collections, museums have a unique ability to connect the local to the global and can place personal beliefs within more general and universal truths, and historical settings.
9. A visit is a personal experience, so museums can help visitors reflect on their place in the world, their identity, their differences and similarities. The creation of cultural identity is not a simple or straightforward process. It is a combination of fixed things – ancestry, religion, community – with more fluid elements. For the eminent British sociologist Stuart Hall it is the personal mix of *roots* – those fixed reference points – and *routes* – the means by which people arrive at where they are at any given point.
10. In these circumstances the role of museums as mediators of knowledge, information and experience becomes more rather than less important. Museums can allow people to explore these disparate cultural forces and position themselves as global citizens, finding their place in the world. Museums can provide a tolerant space where difficult contemporary issues can be explored in safety and in the spirit of debate. This has been most recently seen with the British Museum's series of topical public debates on the role of art and culture in the midst of changing world contexts.

Museums and citizenship

11. Most museums were founded with an idea of public benefit. Early museums invited the 'curious' and the 'studious' to be amazed, educated and inspired. Though often founded from private collections – for instance, that of Sir Elias Ashmole which formed the basis for the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, or that of Sir Hans Sloane which formed the core of the British Museum – they were collections built up to encourage universal knowledge and inspiration. However, public benefit was largely interpreted as arising from the protection and the preservation of collections, and the associated knowledge, for current and future generations. The definition of citizenship fitted the values of its time.

12. Today our definition of public benefit and citizenship is different. It is more inclusive and there is a different balance of rights and responsibilities. Consequently, the context in which the public enjoys and makes use of museums (their collections, knowledge and buildings) has altered. Today people have different expectations, aspirations, preferences and needs. They are potentially more demanding. This changes the museum's relationship with its public.

Box 1: *Line of Vision*, National Gallery. Originally funded by DfES Special Educational Needs fund and now through John Lyons Foundation.

Line of Vision is a collaboration between the National Gallery and London Social Services Departments, which gives children living in care the opportunity to work with professional artists in the Gallery, through creative workshops. This culminated in a professionally mounted exhibition of work in the Space@ng gallery, within the National Gallery. As part of the project, a young people's consultation panel was set up called "Talking Points". This regularly meets with a panel of the Gallery's senior management to put across their ideas and views. One of the young people used his mentoring skills working for Waltham Forest Borough Council as a young person's participation worker. The project has worked over the past two years with a total of 34 looked-after children and young people drawn from five London Borough Social Services Departments, including Waltham Forest. The project has had very positive responses: one participant said that the Gallery helped her relax and concentrate, others commented that the Gallery was a "trusted place", where staff were respectful and listened to ideas and concerns the young people had. Some of the participants have developed a greater interest in the arts both within school and outside.

13. Museums are sometimes perceived to be timeless, standing still and on the sidelines of economic, political and social debates. But the reality is quite different. They cannot be immune from sweeping international, cultural, technological and social changes. In fact, museums are responding by innovating and evolving; they have reshaped the way in which they work, increasing the quality and public benefit of what they have to offer (Box 1). They must remain relevant and inspiring institutions intellectually and ones in which the public – as citizens – play a vital role.
14. In the 21st century museums will need to continue to improve and broaden access, encourage more diverse interpretation of collections and ensure more community engagement and involvement, while building and consolidating the knowledge drawn from collections and staff. Museums have unique wealth, wealth that Government will continue to support and invest in. A key challenge is to ensure that the value created by museums is widely understood, appreciated and supported.

The consultation process

15. The next sections of this paper identify key challenges and opportunities facing England's museums, and suggest areas for positive change. They consider, in turn, the relationship of collections and people; the role of learning and research; the importance of careers, training

and leadership; coherence and advocacy; as well as the need for partnerships and creating better means for measuring cultural value. At the end of each section questions are asked which elicit your views on key issues. These are summarised again at the end, in the Annex.

16. Government is not the only, or even the main, driver for the changes under debate, and part of the challenge will be to identify and clarify responsibilities between Government, bodies such as the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), museums' governing authorities and the museums themselves. Together we need to develop a framework through which museums can renew themselves and safeguard the quality of their provision for all citizens.

Issue 1: Collections and Their Uses

17. The debate about ownership of collections is both a national and an international one. Why, what and how to collect, and for whom, are key considerations for the future. They are key for both those who use museums and for the future expertise that will be needed to care for and interpret the collections.

The importance of collections

18. Collections are at the heart of everything museums do, and England's museums have great riches at their disposal. Around 200 million artefacts are held in private and public museums throughout the UK, charting all aspects of the world, past and present. To maintain their role as vital parts of the public realm, museums need to continue to build access and public understanding through these collections.
19. Museums can be perceived as daunting, but they can also create a sense of intimacy and encourage feelings of ownership and identification, conveyed by and through collections. Museum collections do not only consist of treasures, like the Rosetta Stone, or the wonders of the natural and technological world. They can, and do, reflect the contemporary lives of people, and the vitality, diversity and uniqueness of communities.

Box 2: *Making History*, Tyne and Wear Museums.

In 1999, Tyne and Wear Museums began a project, *Making History*, to mark the new Millennium. *Making History* invited two hundred people of all ages living locally to participate in the creation of a new collection, which would be of personal and lasting interest to the community and create a portrait of life in Tyne and Wear at the start of the 21st century. Over 1000 items were donated, including photographs, soft toys, mementoes and every day objects, documenting the lives of local people, their treasures, their memories and their histories.

20. Understanding and enjoying the past is part of contemporary culture. Museums will need to continue acquiring, to further reflect contemporary society, to revitalise research and to improve collections for the future. Projects like *Making History* (Box 2) show that users can shape collections. The way in which collections are built and interpreted in the 21st century will determine how museums are able to reach out to a wider public now and in the future.
21. Museum collections come from a wide range of sources, and can be used to offer a variety of ways for people to connect with local and global concerns. They have the potential to mobilise a range of emotions and provide tolerant spaces in which difficult issues can be addressed such as the Holocaust or slavery. Collections offer means for personal identification and discovery. They can and should be used to acknowledge and tell different individual and communal stories.

22. A continuing challenge for museums is how to create an inclusive culture that actively values and reflects diversity. This means addressing and encouraging full and active participation of under-represented groups, at all levels, through collecting, learning and access. Welcoming and actively integrating a broad and diverse audience into all arenas of museum work provides the opportunity for museums to renew and re-examine their collections, and place them at the heart of communities (Box 3).

Box 3: *Avenham Community Curators, Harris Museum and Art Gallery Preston.*

Avenham is an inner city ward which has a long and varied history, but which is now an area of high deprivation (and area benefiting from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)). In 2002, the Harris Museum and Art Gallery secured funding from SRB6 to carry out a programme of access and inclusion work with residents of the area, to develop new ways of working with the local communities and enable local people to participate in new cultural opportunities. The Avenham history project directly involved four local people in the development of an exhibition. The individuals were given the title of 'community curators' and worked closely with the Keeper of Social History to develop the skills they needed for this role. They learned about exhibitions, formulated a brief, and undertook research and selected objects for the exhibition. Other members of the community were involved through oral history recording, loans of exhibits and events associated with the exhibition. The community curators were all local residents. As a result, all developed continuing and close associations with the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, becoming volunteer guides and supporting education work, with some becoming members of the community consultation panel. They have since become advocates for the museum and have developed a relationship which extends beyond the original project.

Collections, partnership, custodianship

23. Museums as institutions are undoubtedly expert in the management of their own collections; knowing how to store, care for, preserve and document them. However, they have tended to operate as individual institutions in relation to the creation, acquisition and management of collections.
24. Questions of ownership and use are connected. Within the context of limited resources and broader public benefit, museums' collections and acquisitions, while remaining in the direct ownership of individual institutions, could also be viewed as contributing to the nation's 'public collection' as a single resource under the custodianship of many individual museums. This would not affect the direct ownership of particular collections, but would encourage their wider use and sharing of expertise.

Box 4: *The Portrait of Omai*, National Portrait Gallery, Captain Cook Memorial Museum, National Museums and Galleries of Wales.

A recent example of collaboration on purchase is the *Portrait Of Omai, Joseph Banks and Dr Daniel Solander* (by William Parry 1775-6). *The Portrait of Omai* depicts Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) and the Swedish botanist Dr Daniel Carl Solander (1736-82) with Omai. Banks and Solander were two of eighteenth-century Britain's leading scientists who travelled together on Captain Cook's voyage to the South Pacific in 1768. Omai (c.1753-1776/7) was the Tahitian chosen to travel to Britain by crew of the sailing vessel, the *Adventure*. A national and regional consortium – the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), the Captain Cook Memorial Museum, Whitby, and the National Museums & Galleries of Wales (NMGW) – bought the *Portrait of Omai* with assistance from the National Art Collections Fund as well as private individuals, trusts and supporters of the three museums. Parry's group portrait is the only work to represent the Tahitian as an equal among the company in which he rose to fame. With its scale, composition and grand manner setting, this painting celebrates the collaborative nature of scientific research during the eighteenth century. The portrait had not been on public display since the 1980s, but is now in the Captain Cook Memorial Museum in Whitby having been shown at the NPG and NMGW.

25. As the case studies (Boxes 2 & 4, but also Box 7) strongly suggest, collaboration and partnership must be a part of future collecting and collections management strategies. Joint acquisition (Box 4) is a means of developing and managing collections strategically, and of acquiring objects to add to the available collections and knowledge both locally and nationally. It is a possible solution which brings clear benefits. Beyond the efficient use of limited resources, it can help broaden audiences and access. Developing subject-based networks is another route to sharing knowledge of existing collections and using it to inform future collecting. The establishment of specialist networks is being taken forward, in a number of regions, through funding from the *Renaissance in the Regions (Renaissance)* programme. This is an area to be strengthened and encouraged further throughout the sector (see also Box 7).
26. The museums sector has revisited the issue of collecting (in *Too Much Stuff*¹ and *Collections for the Future*²) exploring some familiar issues. The resources for storage, conservation and care of collections are finite and under pressure, and a significant proportion of collections in major museums, nationally and regionally, are underused.
27. As collections are added to, museums will have to consider imaginative ways of using existing material, including alternative forms of storage and access, and long-term loans within and outside the sector. Many museums have active loan policies, but a framework of strategic partnerships, nationally and internationally, could ensure that collections are used collaboratively for the widest public benefit. *Too Much Stuff* (NMDC 2003) concluded that the

¹ National Museum Directors' Conference (NMDC) (2003) *Too Much Stuff*, London: NMDC.

² Museums Association (MA) (2004) *Collections for the Future*, London: MA.

future of collecting may, in part, require the museums community to think more actively about disposal. The Government asks the sector to continue to address this and will want to discuss how best to take forward discussions and decisions about these important issues.

Collections and new technologies

28. It is important to think of further ways of realising the potential of collections, and of making this national resource available to as many people as possible. Information and communications technologies have great potential to develop access to collections, in ways that are both user-focused and cost-effective. Individual institutions have demonstrated the value of digitising their collections, but the technology is there to build new virtual collections which span or draw from a number of museums both nationally and internationally. Museums in the context of programmes such as EnrichUK and Culture Online are successfully exploring the potential of ICT in the museum domain.
29. New ways of working can be developed. Culture Online, for example, has taken an innovative approach to increasing access to, and participation in, arts and culture. Culture Online brings together cultural organisations with an in-house commissioning team who have experience across a range of the creative industries, broadcasting and online media and who were recruited for their considerable expertise in tailoring projects for untapped audiences (Box 5).

Box 5: *Icons* and *Every Object Tells a Story*, Culture Online.

Two projects currently being commissioned by Culture Online represent how museums and users can benefit from the infinite potential of creative developed online resources. On the *Icons* project, Culture Online has commissioned a production company, Cognitive Applications, to produce an online collection of some of the country's iconic objects, from Stonehenge to the Angel of the North via Magna Carta and the Double-Decker Bus. Through *Icons*, users will be encouraged to browse and explore objects from museums and galleries, buildings and monuments, and objects from daily life that have significant cultural, historical and aesthetic meanings. A 'toolkit' will give unusual perspectives on objects – enabling users to engage with and understand the collection easily. But users will also be able to explore the objects from a variety of viewpoints – historical, scientific, sociological, artistic – and examine objects in new ways, for example 3D views, virtual magnification and online X-rays. Guest curators (e.g. celebrities, experts and the public) will provide annotated routes through the collection.

Every Object Tells a Story will be a participative website which provides an opportunity for people to create their own stories and share their own interpretations and objects online. Led by the Victoria and Albert Museum, in partnership with Channel 4, Ultralab and three regional museums, it will focus on the art of storytelling encouraging people to engage in new ways with collections, by creating online tools that will inspire people to create their own stories and share interpretations, by uploading text, images, video or audio onto the site or by sending text and images from a mobile phone. Outreach sessions will also be uploaded onto the site.

30. Digitisation offers the opportunity to broaden the audience for UK museums' collections to the whole world, but also for museums to add extensively to the value of collections in terms of interpretation, information, access and learning opportunities. Digital environments create new audiences, and the possibility to connect the collections to other learning environments, such as Curriculum Online and university information services. New technological development will make it increasingly possible to integrate collections and their services more closely into people's lives by supporting personal learning environments and matching particular items to user needs, either based around where people are or their level of knowledge. A fuller debate is needed around the potential of ICT for the sector.

Cultural property issues

31. In recent years, the purpose and ownership of collections has been debated with a greater intensity, both in the national and international setting, as legal and moral rights have come to the fore. Items currently housed in museums, although legally acquired, have been subject to other claims and this has challenged long-standing ideas and practices. The focus has been on a number of issues: human remains held in museum collections; works of art appropriated during the Holocaust and the World War II era; and the prevention of the illicit trade in cultural and archaeological artefacts. On the last of these the Government supported the creation of new legislation in 2003 and it has subsequently taken action as part of the Human Tissues Act 2004 to permit national museums to return human remains from their collections in certain circumstances. Government will continue to keep the range of international issues affecting museums and their collections under close scrutiny and will be prepared to respond, with the sector, to additional issues, as and when they arise.
32. Collections and collecting are the central focus of the recent Museums Association (MA) consultation paper *Collections for the Future* (MA 2004), which considers not only how to add to and shape future collections, but how to renew and re-interpret existing collections, to improve management and access. That consultation document is an important step in creating a framework to look at the future direction of collecting nationally.

Questions on Issue 1: Collections and their uses

- Q1: How should museums develop and utilise their collections to serve the concerns and interests of the whole of the population most effectively? Should this include releasing parts of their collections to others, including outside the museum?
- Q2: How can the sector ensure that the opportunities offered by ICT, electronic access and digitisation are fully utilised for the benefit of users and to reach out to non-users?

Issue 2: Learning and Research

33. For museums to fulfil their responsibilities for the encouragement and pursuit of learning they need to engage with their users. Scholarship and research are fundamental to achieve this.
34. Many of England's museums were established to promote learning, and learning continues to underpin many of their activities. It takes many forms, but learning through objects has particular benefits. It is interactive, can encourage the imagination, and stimulate a lifelong passion for discovery. The cumulative impact of museums on the lives of individuals, communities and society is enormous.

Museum-based learning

35. Museums are in a unique position to deliver programmes which enrich and support learning at every stage of people's lives both in the formal education system and outside it (Box 6).

Box 6: *Precious China*, Croydon Clocktower Museum in partnership with the Horniman Museum and Gardens.

Chinese collections from both museums were used to develop a pottery-based project with 9-11 year olds. Inspired by the Clocktower Museum's Chinese pottery and porcelain collection, pupils worked with a professional potter, Sarah Cox, to create their own 'Chinese collection' to display alongside the originals, including ceramic, calligraphy, printmaking and kite-making. Handling items from the Horniman's collection augmented the children's awareness of wider Chinese culture. Teachers noted positive changes in attitude towards Chinese culture, towards the Clocktower Museum and towards other children. The exhibition was an enormous success, opened by the Mayor of Croydon, when the children performed a Chinese-inspired drama they had written themselves.

36. Museums already work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to develop and deliver learning programmes. These mostly take place within museums, but museums also take their collections and expertise out into community venues, residential homes, hospitals, prisons and schools. The evidence gathered from this demonstrates how powerful the impact of museum-based learning can be³. However, evaluation has also brought to the fore issues which museums need to address if they are to sustain and develop their support for lifelong learning.

³ J. Dodd and E. Hooper-Greenhill (2004) *Inspiration, Identity and Learning: The Value of Museums – the Evaluation of the impact of DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning 2003-4*, Leicester: RCMG/FCMS/DfES; J. Stanley (2004) *Evaluation of the MGEP II: Final Report on the Impact of Phase 2 of the Museums and Galleries Education Programme*, Warwick: CEI/University of Warwick; J. Dodd and E. Hooper-Greenhill (2002) *Learning through Culture: the DfES Museums and Galleries Education Programme*, Leicester: RCMG/DfES; H. Gould (2004) *What did we learn this time? The Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative (2002-3)*, Bude: CLMG/DfES.

Museums and the curriculum

37. There is a great demand for museums to deliver programmes which enrich and support the full breadth of the school curriculum. The Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (2004) prioritises support for families in early years and primary schools, increased post-16 participation and improving the literacy and numeracy skills of adults. The strategy suggests this can be achieved through personalised learning, through providers becoming more responsive to the needs of learners, and through greater engagement with communities. It connects education with better health, lower crime rates and good citizenship.
38. The drive to transform the education system offers enormous opportunities for museums but it also poses new challenges. *Renaissance in the Regions*, DfES's Museum and Gallery Education Programme and the DCMS/DfES funded national/regional partnership projects have all demonstrated the importance of museums in supporting the delivery of an enriched curriculum. But museums must become more responsive providers. They need to stimulate demand in schools as well as build supply through developing their own capacity. There is a need to foster broad based partnership working both with those in the formal education system and with professionals outside it. A great deal has been achieved, but there is a continuing need to embed support for learning into the culture of each museum, to ensure that best practice is promoted across the sector and sustained.
39. Government's commitment to the role of education in museums is set out in full in the museums education strategy to be published jointly with DfES. This explains how, by working in partnership with the museums sector, Government will help to build the capacity of the sector and support the professional development of its staff to support learning in all its forms. It is based on a belief that every child of school age has an entitlement to a creative curriculum, and that museums have a significant role to play in delivering this.
40. If museums are truly to take on board the need to stimulate and support learning, they will need to re-appraise how they engage their users and deliver their services. MLA's *Inspiring Learning for All* (www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk) framework can support museums in doing this. It draws on best practice, extensive consultation and piloting to help museums to audit and benchmark their learning provision, plan improvements and become learning organisations themselves.

A research culture

41. To continue to create a quality of experience for users and learners, it is important that the research culture across the whole museums sector is strengthened. Museums must be able to communicate to the public how their collections came to be made, what techniques were used, why they are important and the meanings that they have had for their makers and users, and those they retain for society today. All this depends on developing the necessary knowledge and understanding that comes from caring for and researching the collections. High profile discoveries sometimes focus attention on the importance of research. The re-identification of the *Madonna of the Pinks* as a work by Raphael, for example, was based on systematic research on works in the National Gallery's collection. More usually, research work is unseen, modestly underpinning all that museums do.

Box 7: *Reactivating Collections in Partnership*, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in partnership with Bexhill Museum; Buckinghamshire County Museum and Art Gallery; Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums (Brighton and Hove) and Ipswich Borough Council Museums and Galleries.

In 2002 the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London, launched a project to research and make accessible the excavated finds of the museum's namesake, William Flinders Petrie (1854–1942). Petrie was an industrious archaeologist who financed his numerous excavations through subscription. Those public museums who sponsored Petrie benefited from a share of the finds allowed out of Egypt. Whilst the distribution system was for the purpose of public understanding of ancient Egypt, it resulted in a somewhat idiosyncratic dispersal of collections. The Petrie Museum estimate that Petrie's excavated finds are distributed amongst 120 museums in the UK and abroad. Having set up a successful partnership with Manchester Museum, the Petrie successfully applied to the Designation Challenge Fund to set up four further partnerships with museums in South East: Bexhill Museum, Buckinghamshire County Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums (Brighton and Hove) and Ipswich Borough Council Museums and Galleries. The project employed an Egyptologist to work with partner museums to catalogue the collections to enable them to be better researched and more accessible and meaningful for all users. The partner museums wanted to re-activate the collections because they believed there was a potential demand locally. They wanted to benefit from expertise and research to bring to prominence a part of their collections they knew to be underused. The project had a range of benefits for specialist and general audiences. Over 2500 items were brought together in an online catalogue (www.accessingvirtualegypt.ucl.ac.uk) which allows the five collections to be seen collectively and individually.

This project stimulated interest both within and outside the partner museums, revealing local historical connections, for instance in Bexhill a local doctor was discovered to have excavated with Petrie. Items were identified and the research value and potential of the collection were strengthened, stimulating new research into the collection. An important discovery was ancient Nubian material in Brighton Museum and Art Gallery of particular interest to the museum due to its work with local Sudanese communities. As a result of the project, three of the four museums put on new exhibitions of their Egyptian material, a positive outcome unplanned at the start.

42. In some academic fields such as Egyptology and particular areas of natural history and conservation, museums lead. However, looking at research across the museums sector there is a lack of consistency. There is excellence: some museums, in particular national and university museums, can and do dedicate significant resources to research, but others in the sector can assign it only a low priority. To some extent, the amount of research done will be institutionally determined and resource dependent. However, it is important that the key museums in particular, but also the museums sector as a whole, continues to be seen as embodying academic excellence and research.

Quality and research

43. The experience of individual museums shows that a strong research base, if well communicated, fosters creativity and accessibility at all levels (as Box 7 and 8 show). It is also vital to the international reputation of England's cultural institutions, and to future collaborations and partnership on the national, European and international stage.

Box 8: Research at the Natural History Museum.

A beneficiary of NERC⁴, ESRC⁵, PPARC⁶ and BBSRC⁷ funding, the research arm of the Natural History Museum (NHM) has international standing, employing dedicated research scientists and operating as a centre for excellence in natural sciences. It trains postgraduates in a wide variety of scientific fields including research relating to biomedicine, environmental quality, biodiversity, evolution and geological systems (156 PhD students are currently studying at NHM and 34 are undertaking MSc studies). The NHM is also at the forefront of work in biological and mineralogical systematics⁸. In 2002-3, NHM staff authored 518 articles in refereed publications covering zoology, mineralogy, palaeontology, entomology and botany.

44. The field of academic research is competitive, and that is as it should be. To maintain distinction means constant attention to standards, support and results. With incentives, means of rewards, patterns of collaboration and recognised centres of excellence for learning and research, the research value of England's museums can enjoy wider recognition. The benefits of this can be seen at the Natural History Museum (Box 8).
45. In the museums sector there is no agreed sector-wide method for comparing or evaluating museum-based research. In certain areas it may be difficult to attract resources for research work, but access to targeted funds and a more consistent system of evaluation are the principal ways in which a widespread and active research culture could be fostered. In the arts and humanities, new possibilities are opening up as the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) becomes a fully-fledged Research Council – the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Government will work with museums and the future AHRC to secure the potential that this brings for the museums sector, in terms of funding and closer links with the Higher Education (HE) sector.
46. Indeed a key consideration is the way in which ties and patterns of collaboration between the museums sector and the Higher and Further Education sectors (HE and FE) can be enhanced, strengthened and made more strategic. Good links and initiatives exist (Box 9), but there is a

⁴ Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

⁵ Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC).

⁶ Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

⁷ Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

⁸ Systematic biology – in which scientists discover, describe, name and classify living and fossil organisms, and uncover their evolutionary relationships – is central to the life sciences. By devising a single agreed system of scientific names, it enables people around the world to communicate with each other about the diversity of life on Earth, past and present. It provides guides for the identification of species, and classifications that allow predictions to be made about their properties.

need for a more widespread, formalised and systematic exchange between museums, HE and FE, particularly in terms of staff, students and scholars. This is not only important for the development of research on collections. A closer working relationship will allow succession planning and assist with the training and development of present and future museum professionals.

Box 9: Collaborations between the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the Higher Education (HE) Sector.

The V&A runs a variety of fellowships and partnerships with HE institutions. There is an exchange fellowship with Sussex University which means that staff have experience of both the academic and the museum environment. The V&A also runs three postgraduate programmes with the Royal College of Art on the History of Design and Material Culture (1650-Present), Renaissance Decorative Arts and Culture (1400-1600) and Conservation. In this way the collections are used for teaching, and provide research opportunities for a larger number of scholars bringing the collections to an ever-wider audience.

47. For the future of research and scholarship to be assured the museums sector as a whole, and key museums in particular, must be recognised not just for their collections, but as places for academic research and excellence. Government welcomes the recent University Museums Group UK report⁹ and the AHRB Consultation document¹⁰, both of which highlight the potential for these linkages in the context of university museums.

Questions on Issue 2: Learning and research

- Q3: How can museums strengthen their commitment to education as a core and strategic priority within the overall commitment to collections and users?
- Q4: How can a strong research culture be built and sustained, as well as quality measured across the museums sector? What role should Government play?
- Q5: How could stronger links be created between the Higher and Further Education sectors and museums?

⁹ University Museums Group UK (2004) *University Museums in the UK: A National Resource for the 21st Century*, Norwich: University Museums Group UK.

¹⁰ AHRB (2004) *Report on the AHRB's Support for University Museums and Galleries*, Bristol: AHRB.

Issue 3: Careers, Training and Leadership

The workforce

48. Museums are about objects, people and meanings. Their future prosperity depends as much on investing in the workforce as it does on investing in buildings and collections. The museum workforce comprises, amongst others, of administrators, archivists, conservators, curators, designers, educators, publicists, scientists and visitor services staff. It is dedicated, talented and enthusiastic.

Career progression

49. Entrants to the museums sector have to demonstrate a high level of training and experience, in terms of generic, or specific, qualifications. However, whilst much may be demanded of them in terms of pre-entry standards, entry requirements are not consistent across the sector and it is not always clear that initial training matches the job they will be expected to do.
50. Workforce reform and professional development in other sectors do not always seem to have taken hold in museums. Recruitment to the museums sector seems to pose little problem: supply frequently exceeds demand. However, this may be one reason why there has been little cross-sector reviewing and up-dating of the way museum staff are recruited, trained, promoted and supported in their work.
51. Volunteers are a significant proportion of the museum workforce: a 1999 study put the total in England at more than 25,000, 60% of the total workforce. Museums, irrespective of size, benefit from the specialist and generalist skills that volunteers bring, working in all areas of the museums including Boards of Trustees. Volunteering can promote social inclusion, develop talent, and provide work experience as a route to employment. It is important that, in employing volunteers, the sector recognises the skills and enthusiasm they bring, and that it considers how it can better recognise, accredit and support their contribution.
52. In relation to the workforce more generally, there is a lack of career opportunities and support, of career progression and mobility between museums. Some programmes are designed to promote awareness of the need to manage careers, most notably successful schemes run by the Museums Association (MA)¹¹. However, the sector as a whole needs to be better at developing incentives and opportunities for the professional development of museum staff through their careers to ensure it can continue to recruit and retain the right staff.
53. Staff mobility between museums – for example secondments, internships, and shadowing – provides valuable experience and on-the-job training in a sector where permanent posts are limited (Box 10). Previous programmes based on staff exchanges (The Sharing Museum Skills Millennium Awards, for example) have been largely successful. MLA, Government and the sector should explore further programmes and initiatives to be extended across the museums workforce,

¹¹ The MA's Associateship and Fellowship schemes.

nationally and internationally, as in, for example, the new DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning funding, which includes an allocation for secondments for education staff and teachers.

Box 10: *Close Encounters, partnerships with Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archive Council (YMLAC).*

Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archive Council (YMLAC) is running a *Close Encounters* scheme, in association with professional bodies and regional groups, which will provide opportunities for members of the sector to participate in exchanges, secondments, shadowing and mentoring schemes, in order to raise awareness across the three domains. This project responds to work undertaken prior to the setting up of YMLAC, it showed that there was little cross-domain understanding or working. The scheme is open to all museums, libraries and archives staff.

Training

54. Museum staff should have the opportunity to acquire new skills and competencies, have access to appropriate training, and be able to seek employment and promotion in different parts of the sector. For this to happen museums need to be clearer, more confident and more unified about training and skills needs, priorities and responsibilities, to enable staff from a variety of professional backgrounds to plan their development.
55. In 2002, Demos¹² reported on aspects of workforce development in the sector. Demos suggested that the sector did not base workforce development on either an holistic view of its current skills need, or how these might change in the future. This indicates the need to have recognised and effective bodies for professional training.
56. The planned development of the Sector Skills Council for Creative and Cultural Skills provides hope of a more strategic approach to professional career development. The MLA, through *Renaissance* and through its *Workforce Development Strategy*, is addressing issues of standards, agendas and priorities for the workforce at the national and regional level. The MA is bringing to light important issues such as low pay in the museums sector¹³. Government, MLA, the MA and the museums sector need to keep these initiatives under review to ensure that there is an effective strategic and delivery framework to understand and fulfil the training needs that museum professionals have during the course of their careers.

Diversity

57. One of the key areas of concern around the current museum workforce is its lack of diversity. In key professional areas (managerial and curatorial) it does not reflect the makeup of the population that it is intended to serve¹⁴. The MA/MLA have pioneered positive action

¹² Demos (2003) *Towards a Workforce Development Strategy*, London: Demos/MLA.

¹³ Incomes Data Services (IDS) (2004) *Pay in Museums*, London: IDS/MA.

¹⁴ IDS (2004) *Pay in Museums*, London: IDS/MA; London Museums Agency (2003) *Holding Up the Mirror*, London: LMA.

traineeships (see Box 11), and Arts Council England (ACE) is promoting a series of *Inspire* fellowships in London national museums. These initiatives are very welcome, but more must be done¹⁵. Creating a more diverse workforce, representative of museums' users, is a challenge that has to be addressed. Government and the museums sector have shared responsibility to effect this change.

Box 11: *Diversify*, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and Museums Association.

The MA has identified diversity as a key issue, and is making important in-roads in training new museum professionals from ethnic minority and under-represented groups. With funding from a variety of sources, especially MLA as part of *Renaissance*, it is forging ahead on positive action as a core principle of its *Diversify* project. By working with museums and universities, the project aims to help people from minority ethnic communities and under-represented groups to gain the right skills and experience to compete on an equal basis for jobs in the museums sector, and to help them gain their important first posting. The MA's own target is to offer at least 50 traineeships or bursaries by the end of 2006. The MA believes that this contribution will make an impact and feed new candidates into middle and senior management in the long-term. The recent evaluation has shown that participating museums feel that this is a very productive programme. As well as providing strong and positive role models for other staff, the trainees have helped introduce new working practices¹⁶.

Leadership and governance

58. Developing future leaders is a particular concern within the cultural sector. Leading museums can be a challenging and complex task that demands a broad skills base. Museums need to identify talent and foster it so that the sector can invest and plan for succession.
59. There are some welcome developments. The MA and the National Museum Directors' Conference (NMDC) ran a modest initiative to support existing leaders through a mentoring and networking scheme. The Clore Duffield Foundation is sponsoring Fellows, to nurture aspiring leaders across the cultural sector, and a number of museum professionals are included among the first group of Fellows. However, these programmes are limited to a small number of participants and a more widespread response to training and mentoring is needed to develop the sector's capacity and allow the best of the workforce to become future leaders. Linkages and partnerships with the private sector will be key to succession planning and fostering leadership for the sector as a whole. Attracting and developing a talented but more diverse range of leaders must be at the heart of any new developments.

¹⁵ G. Porter (2004) *Diversify! The impact of Positive Action Traineeship*, London: MA/MLA; Arts Council England (ACE) is launching a smaller curatorial fellowship initiative: *Inspire*.

¹⁶ G. Porter (2004) *Diversify! The impact of Positive Action Traineeships*, London: MA/MLA.

60. Government and the sector need to ensure that all sections of the population are better represented on museums' boards. DCMS has a particular responsibility to ensure that the Trustees of our national bodies are drawn from as wide a pool as possible. There needs to be the right mix of skills on the Boards of the bodies which DCMS funds, and DCMS will need to review the mechanisms for achieving this. This is essential if these cultural institutions are to have continued relevance and meaningful connections for all citizens in the 21st century. Other parts of the sector could also productively consider issues of governance, particularly local museums when looking towards Trust status.
61. To encourage quality and access in museums for the future, Government and the sector must work to ensure that the routes to professional success in museums are transparent, recognisable and attainable to all who are motivated and have the potential to develop the right skills.

Questions on Issue 3: Careers, training and leadership

- Q6: How can the sector achieve the right balance of pre- and post-entry training to build skills for the range of their workforce?
- Q7: What initiatives and targets would increase mobility, training and career progression for all types of museum professionals?
- Q8: What must be done to secure a better representation of currently under-represented groups in the museum workforce, and in the sector's governance?

Issue 4: Coherence and Advocacy

62. Looking across the museums sector can seem like a visual perception test. The sector may appear fragmented or coherent, depending on what you are looking at and where you are looking from. This is not necessarily a cause for concern but it can create difficulties for the sector when seeking to make their voice heard alongside that of other cultural sectors.

Fragmentation

63. The fragmentation is in part a historical legacy, reflecting the ways in which museums have been managed and funded over the last 200 years. This is still visible today in the different funding streams across the sector.
64. In England, two Government departments sponsor museums directly: DCMS and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). In addition, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provides some support to university museums through the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) and the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB). Through Formula Grant, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) supports spending on local authority museums. Independent museums rely almost entirely on the funds they generate from visitors and charitable donations. In addition a significant number of museums are run by English Heritage and the National Trust.
65. In recent years, other sources of funding from DCMS have become available for defined groups of museums, most of them channelled through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). These include funding for the *Renaissance in the Regions* programme, Designation Challenge funding¹⁷ and the DCMS Wolfson Fund¹⁸. Museums continue to access other Government funds, as well as Lottery funding, principally through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Representation

66. The distinctions within the sector are reflected through the structure of representation. The National Museum Directors' Conference (NMDC) represents national museums, directly funded by Government¹⁹. University and independent museums have their own representative bodies (the University Museums Group UK and the Association of Independent Museums respectively). The Group for Larger Local Authority Museums (GLLAM) speaks for a group of 25 local authority museum services. The membership of all these bodies is wider than just England.
67. Two organisations act on behalf of the wider museums sector. The Museums Association (MA), an independent body for all museums (the membership body for all museum

¹⁷ This is available to the 56 non-national museums with designated collections.

¹⁸ This is jointly funded by DCMS and the Wolfson Foundation and provides capital grants to improve access in a range of national and non-national museums.

¹⁹ NMDC is UK wide and also counts national libraries and the National Archives among its members.

professionals) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) which offers advice and expertise to Government and others across the three domains of museums, archives and libraries in England.

68. This multifarious structure of representation has led the museums sector to appear to speak as disparate interest groups, rather than as a unified sector, which may hamper its ability to persuade outside the sector. Whilst there are examples of imaginative collaboration, the sector needs to act cohesively and strategically, and be aware of, and more involved in, developments elsewhere. For instance, its links with sectors with some shared interests (eg: the arts; the historic environment and the creative industries) should be stronger.

There are three ways in which this could be achieved:

- Through more effective advocacy and leadership;
 - Through more effective sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships, with more sharing of information, in particular disseminating examples of success and good practice across the sector;
 - Through the development of a wider and more consistent evidence base.
69. Partnership and a more consistent evidence base are areas where Government and the sector can work effectively together to build on recent progress. This is addressed in the next section “Partnership and Measuring Value”.

Advocacy

70. In 2004, NMDC, MLA, the MA, AIM and GLLAM, Regional agencies and Hubs came together for the first time to produce *A Manifesto for Museums*, making a concerted case to Government, backed by research, to argue for a significant increase in funding from the 2004 Spending Review. This occurred at a time of increasing growth of national/regional partnerships, and a series of reviews of museums’ work²⁰. This partnership is in its early stages and needs to be reinforced and sustained if the museums sector is to be a successful advocate for itself and fulfil its potential over coming years.
71. It is often argued that Government’s direct funding of a handful of museums (mainly, but not exclusively, nationals) skews its understanding of, and relationship with, the sector as a whole, working against coherence. The unique status of the nationals, protected by statute, remains an argument for retaining access to direct Government funding. In contrast, the national arts companies (such as the Royal Opera House and the Royal Shakespeare Company), no matter how they are constituted, do not receive direct funding but are treated for funding purposes as clients of Arts Council England (ACE).
72. It is important, in an open and positive debate such as this, to explore the issues of funding and leadership in the museums sector, and to consider the relationship the sector as a whole has with Government (at both national and local level). It is equally necessary to explore what

²⁰ NMDC (2004a) *National Dimensions*, London: NMDC; NMDC (2004b) *Museums and Galleries: Creative Engagement*, London: NMDC; NMDC (2004c) *Valuing Museums*, London: NMDC; GLLAM (2004) *Enriching Lives*, Leicester: GLLAM.

changes may be needed to encourage improved coherence in planning and prioritisation, more effectively integrated capital and revenue funding, service efficiencies, better use of existing assets, enhanced sustainability and greater responsiveness to local community needs and priorities. There may be many ways this can be achieved, although the model of a unitary funding council has sometimes been suggested as a way of creating a shared national strategy for museums and their users, and a better service to the public.

73. The Government's work on a new Local Government Strategy is looking more widely at future patterns of public service delivery. It aims to improve the relationship between local and central government, accountabilities and responsibilities at each level for the delivery of services, funding structures, community leadership, citizen engagement and delivery of services. The Efficiency Review also sets a clear agenda for greater focus of resources on service to the public. It would, therefore, seem worthwhile to consider again the ways in which museum services are organised at local and regional level and how the museums network benefits from national support, building on the initial success of the *Renaissance* programme.
74. In recent years there have been substantial shifts in the financial environment for local authority museums, allowing greater flexibility in the way museums can operate. This includes the new prudential capital finance system – which provides greater flexibility to borrow – and, for certain local authorities, wider powers to trade. In some circumstances local authority museums (eg: in Sheffield and York) have found the option of moving to Trust status attractive, and MLA is drawing together practical guidance for those considering Trust status.
75. Government has not taken a view on these important structural issues, but they may be areas of productive further debate. Any such debate could usefully be informed by a fresh look at structural and funding models which operate in other European countries and whether they foster greater coherence and impact than has been the case in the UK.
76. The MLA, funded by Government, will continue to act as a source of advice and information to museums, but it has equally important roles in relationship to policy and strategy. Following MLA's recent Peer Review, DCMS will work with the MLA to identify the policy, strategic and leadership functions it should undertake within the museums sector, including in partnership with the other representative bodies, to consolidate the considerable gains from *Renaissance* and to build on recent cross-sector collaborations.
77. What is clear is that for the contributions of the museums sector to be recognised – socially, economically, politically, and culturally – the sector needs to demonstrate that it is cohesive, innovative and visionary. This does not necessarily depend upon structures, but does require it to appear and act as a unified sector, with a common direction and purpose, whilst not losing the benefits of its inherent eclecticism.

Question on Issue 4: Coherence and advocacy

- Q 9: Would structural changes better support museums and provide effective means of ensuring a national strategy for museums?
- Q 10: How best do we combine more coherent and efficient delivery of museum services with a service that is responsive to the needs of local communities and users?

Issue 5: Partnership and Measuring Value

The need for partnerships

78. A coherent and cohesive sector does not mean a uniform one. The distinctive identities of England's large and small museums are some of their greatest strengths. However, a more strategic overall vision, the identification of areas of commonality and a greater ability to unify over particular issues and to work together in supplying high quality services, will benefit both the museums and all of their users.

Box 12: The *Queen of the Night*, British Museum, Partnership UK Scheme.

A recent important and exciting acquisition for the British Museum is the *Queen of the Night*, a 4000 year old Terracotta relief of a Babylonian Goddess, one of only two pieces to date from this period. To mark the significance of the purchase, the British Museum organized a tour of the museums that are part of its Partnership UK scheme. In spring 2004, the relief traveled to Glasgow (Burrell Collection), Sunderland (Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens), Leicester (New Walk Museum and Art Gallery), and the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London. Since autumn 2004, it has been to Birmingham (Museum and Art Gallery) and Cardiff (National Museums and Galleries in Wales). It may also go to Baghdad. This initial tour was extremely popular. While at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens the relief became the focus of enormous attention, doubling the normal weekend attendance. Short talks by British Museum curatorial staff filled Sunderland Museum's lecture theatre to capacity, and the free events for families to mark the visit – including story telling, and a workshop on early Mesopotamian writing – were an enormous success. 2500 visitors came to the museum.

79. Good examples of joint working are the burgeoning partnerships forged through *Renaissance in the Regions* and DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning (national/regional partnerships). Historically, the sector has approached partnerships cautiously. But there has been a change in the quality and frequency of contacts between museums across the sector with loans, more touring exhibitions, and more working between museums (Box 12). Equally, *Renaissance* provides a framework for changing provision regionally, and for partnerships to be developed with local communities and organisations (Box 10 & 13). These nationally funded initiatives build on those that individual museums have independently forged.
80. Beyond this, the museums sector needs to secure broader alliances with other sectors, funders and new partners. Partnership will be key to harnessing the potential presented by new technologies (including links with e-learning) determining museums' ability to be more efficient in their use of resources, and in their delivery of services to users. New partnerships will be needed if the sector is to engage with the public, and Government, in a more effective way.

Box 13: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, West Midlands (MLA West Midlands) and the Cultural Diversity Network.

MLA West Midlands has been working with English Heritage and the Local Government Association to widen the remit of this region's Cultural Diversity Network and to invite new partners who are also working on developing cultural diversity issues. The network aims to build on the work of the Cultural Diversity Network, and issues around developing new audiences and partners. Over 60 delegates from museum, library, heritage, and cultural sectors attended the first meeting.

81. New partnerships also need to be thought of in the wider European and international context. The enlarged European Union, in particular, presents a forum which can encourage the development of strategic alliances between institutions, to ease the mobility of collections, the circulation of museums staff and the potential for sharing expertise, interpretation and good practice. England's museums are in a strong position, in terms of their educational, research and management potential, to work with partners in Europe and internationally who are looking for models on which to base new museums or to implement modernisation and reform. Equally, England's museums can substantially benefit from the expertise and knowledge brought from overseas, in exploring the care, management and interpretation of their collections.
82. This could, perhaps, also provide the basis on which, in the longer term, arrangements for shared ownership and use of collections could be built up between a number of museums in different countries or on different continents.

Measuring cultural value

83. Consistent and convincing bodies of evidence about museums and what people get from them can strengthen the impact and work of the museums, both as a sector and within the wider cultural arena. Furthermore, a strong body of evidence will help underpin and illustrate museums' arguments for resources to a wide range of potential funders, both in the public and the private sectors.
84. In the past, the sector has sometimes seemed reluctant to work with Government to develop indicators and statistics of value that can be used to prompt and inform policy decisions. This reflects, perhaps, a general distrust and dislike of the need to quantify performance as this begs the question of how to measure cultural quality. It is also not an unreasonable response to changing requirements of Government. But coherence, partnership and vision are linked to evidence. The benchmarking works of GLLAM and *Renaissance*, as well as the standardising of data collection by DCMS, the framework of *Inspiring Learning for All* and the DCMS participation in the household survey, represent important developments in this area. However, Government can and should become more skilled at describing the wider context.
85. *Government and the Value of Culture* (DCMS 2004) has made it clear: Government needs to look beyond an instrumental framework. Government and museums need to articulate better the

sector's worth, in response to a clearer understanding of the benefits for users and non-users, as well as their own needs. This necessitates a consensus on what constitutes quality overall and what an evidence base needs to consist of. By creating a better adapted framework for the assessment of cultural value, both the museums sector and Government will be able to understand better the impact the sector is making and be able to show why it should be supported. Together Government and the sector must develop more perceptive ways of describing and measuring quality and impact.

86. Both the Business Excellence Model and the Peer Review process could provide a positive way forward for museums. There are also examples from other sectors, for instance the Higher Education sector, which might provide a way forward in measuring excellence not just in research, but institutions more generally.
87. Whatever method is used, Government recognises that it must be sensitive to the needs of the sector and users. It should not overwhelm or stifle museums' diversity, activities, service to users or the pursuit of excellence. Whatever means are found must be implemented intelligently, with rigour and should seek to measure and demonstrate the quality of engagement. There has to be a framework to understand and demonstrate public value.
88. The 21st century presents substantial challenges and opportunities which can allow museums to play an even more central role in the life of individuals, communities and the nation. This requires collaboration, partnership and effective leadership. An effective evidence base, powerful advocacy, a unified sense of purpose and direction will unlock the potential of the sector for all those who work in it and who benefit from its services.

Questions on Issue 5: Partnership and measuring value

- Q11: How can partnerships within the museums sector and with other sectors be better embedded?
- Q12: What systems or methods should be used to assess quality and success in the museums sector?
- Q 13: What would need to happen to make international strategic alliances possible between museums?

Conclusion

89. This paper has set out areas of challenge and development related to our ambitions for museums in the 21st century. The issues proposed are selective and not exclusive. They represent what Government believes needs to be raised and achieved. Some will think it has not covered everything or the right things, others will see it as raising too many issues at once. The important thing is to start the debate.
90. The questions arising throughout the paper are presented at the end in summary form in the Annex. We would like your views on any or all of these. This is your chance to contribute to the debate, to work with Government to reach an agreed way forward, and to secure for museums the role they deserve at the heart of our changing society, providing the tools to understand ourselves and the world in which we live.

Annex

Issue 1: Collections and Their Uses

- Q1: How should museums develop and utilise their collections to serve the concerns and interests of the whole of the population most effectively? Should this include releasing parts of their collections to others, including outside the museum?
- Q2: How can the sector ensure that the opportunities offered by ICT, electronic access and digitisation are fully utilised for the benefit of users and to reach out to non-users?

Issue 2: Learning and Research

- Q3: How can museums strengthen their commitment to education as a core and strategic priority within the overall commitment to collections and users?
- Q4: How can a strong research culture be built and sustained, as well as quality measured across the museums sector? What role should Government play?
- Q5: How could stronger links be created between the Higher and Further Education sectors and museums?

Issue 3: Careers, Training and Leadership

- Q6: How can the sector achieve the right balance of pre- and post-entry training to build skills for the range of their workforce?
- Q7: What initiatives and targets would increase mobility, training and career progression for all types of museum professionals?
- Q8: What must be done to secure a better representation of currently under-represented groups in the museum workforce, and in the sector's governance?

Issue 4: Coherence and Advocacy

- Q9: Would structural changes better support museums and provide effective means of ensuring a national strategy for museums?
- Q10: How best do we combine more coherent and efficient delivery of museum services with a service that is responsive to the needs of local communities and users?

Issue 5: Partnership and Measuring Value

- Q11: How can partnerships within the museums sector and with other sectors be better embedded?
- Q12: What systems or methods should be used to assess quality and success in the museums sector?
- Q13: What would need to happen to make international strategic alliances possible between museums?

Acronyms

ACE	Arts Council England
AHRB	Arts and Humanities Research Board
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
AIM	Association of Independent Museums
BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
CLMG	Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FE	Further Education
GLLAM	The Group for Larger Local Authority Museums
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
IDS	Incomes Data Services
LMA	London Museums Agency
MA	Museums Association
MLA	The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
NPG	National Portrait Gallery
NMGW	National Museums and Galleries of Wales
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
NHM	Natural History Museum
NMDC	National Museum Directors' Conference
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PPARC	Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council
RCMG	Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, Leicester University
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
YMLAC	Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

Acknowledgements

Many people within and outside the museums sector have generously contributed their time to the discussion of issues presented in this paper. DCMS would like to thank all those who participated in such discussions.

DCMS would like to extend particular thanks to the members of the External Advisory Group who assisted in discussing earlier drafts of this paper:

Hassan Arero (Horniman Museum and Gardens)

Tom Bentley (Demos)

Alec Coles (Tyne and Wear Museums)

Roanne Dodds (The Jerwood Foundation)

Michael Eakin (Arts Council England, North West)

Nick Merriman (Institute of Archaeology, University College London)

Sandy Nairne (National Portrait Gallery)

Lola Young (Metal)



**Department for Culture,
Media and Sport**
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH
PP 672 January 2005