

A COMMON WEALTH

Museums in the Learning Age

A Report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

by David Anderson OBE



Lifelong learners take a break during their visit to the British Museum.
(Photo: Martin Salter)

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Foreword by Alan Howarth, Minister for the Arts



Education is, as the Prime Minister has said, the passion of this Government and at the heart of its ambition. Within my own Department, we are strongly aware of the contribution to learning that museums and galleries can make. Raising standards of cultural education and training is one of the four central themes which underlie all areas of our work. So I am delighted to welcome this second edition of David Anderson's report on the educational role of museums and galleries.

Education surely should be central to the work of museums and galleries. Many take their responsibility very seriously, offering excellent and well-used services to people of all ages. The Government wants to encourage and develop this so that there is a more consistent spread of expertise and benefit throughout the country. My Department has been working closely with the Department for Education and Employment to help this to happen. Both Departments are keen to see museums and galleries play a full part in supporting the National Curriculum for schoolchildren and in providing opportunities for people of all ages and all backgrounds to increase their knowledge and level of understanding.

Since it was first published over two years ago, David Anderson's report has had an immense impact on both the museums and the education communities. It has become a highly regarded work in its field and copies have gone to many other countries in the world as well as throughout the United Kingdom. It has caused many organisations to appreciate the great educational value in Britain's museums and galleries, and it has encouraged them to consider afresh this vital issue. We are fortunate in possessing extraordinary quality and variety in our museums and galleries which, between them, cover a huge spectrum of subjects. The report has emphasised that education is for all museums and galleries: small ones as well as large ones, specialised ones and more general ones. All hold materials which can contribute to learning, and have the expertise necessary to transform objects into resources that people can use for learning and enjoyment.

A great deal has happened in the last two years: not least the election of a new Government committed to realising the benefits of the emerging learning society and to developing our creativity in the knowledge-based global economy of the next century. There have been many other changes too, such as with Lottery funding, and a second edition of the report was felt to be justified. Information Technologies continue to develop apace and now a separate chapter is devoted to this subject.

Many people have contributed to the revised text. They have helped David Anderson to produce an up-to-date and relevant report which will continue to provide the stimulation and encouragement of the first. I commend it to you. I hope that you will find it of great value as we strive together to develop the role that museums and galleries play in their contributions to learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Howarth', written in a cursive style.

Alan Howarth

Preface

The first edition of this report was published in January 1997. Since then we have witnessed the introduction of a range of major policy initiatives by the new Government in both the education and cultural sectors. The significance of these developments is such as to necessitate a new edition rather than a further printing of the original report.

The second edition includes additional chapters on the emergence of the digital museum as part of the new cultural network, and on the role of museums in the fostering of creativity in our society. Almost all of the original chapters of the report have been revised and updated to include details of the opportunities for museums that have arisen from provision of new Government and Lottery funding streams, including the New Opportunities Fund; the Department for Education and Employment's new initiatives in the schools, further education and higher education sectors and in support of lifelong learning; the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's new targets for the cultural sector; and the decision to establish the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council as well as other developments within the museum sector.

The report also incorporates the results of recent research and includes in the bibliography a number of significant publications that have appeared since 1996. Where appropriate, the case studies included in the first edition have been revised and updated. However, the original recommendations, which evolved through extensive consultation within the sector and were approved by the report's Steering Committee, remain unchanged except to acknowledge alterations to the names of the organisations to which these recommendations were first directed.

Museums in the United Kingdom have always been seen as educational institutions. Yet this is the first comprehensive report to examine their educational role in full. Its publication reflects a renewed awareness of the contribution that museums make to lifelong learning, and the even greater contribution that they could make in future if their work was coordinated at local, regional and national levels.

The terms of reference of the report were 'to review the current activities of museums in the United Kingdom as centres for formal and informal learning, and identify how this function can be effectively developed'. The report proposes targets for this development. It also seeks to define the educational role of museums, and the principles of educational provision they require to identify and resolve practical issues.

The report is directed particularly to policy makers and key decision makers in the museum and education sectors and others concerned with the use of museums as a learning resource. These include: the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which commissioned this report, and the other Government departments which are principally responsible for museums and education, the Department for Education and Employment and the Scottish Office, Welsh Office and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland; the Museums & Galleries Commission and its successor body, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; national and local organisations with responsibility, both statutory and professional, for museums and local education authorities and their governing bodies; funding bodies, including educational trusts, foundations and sponsors; and museum managers, museum professionals and educators in other sectors who use museums.

Museums in the United Kingdom range in size from major national institutions employing more than one thousand staff, to small independent museums with no paid staff at all. Given the diversity of these museums, it is expected that organisations will identify which recommendations are achievable by them in the short-term and which, in the longer-term, they can work towards.

For the first edition two questionnaire surveys were conducted to provide information about current education policies and practices in museums. The first on museum policies and provision was sent in August 1994 to a sample of 1600 museums, eliciting 566 valid responses. The second, sent in October 1995 to a sample of 210 museums whose responses to the first questionnaire indicated that they made deliberate provision for education, sought more detailed information on educational provision; this elicited 88 valid responses. The questionnaire surveys were conducted by Dr Stuart Davies of the University of Leeds.

To complement this qualitative and quantitative data, a series of fourteen colloquia was held in association with the ten Area Museum Councils at locations throughout the United Kingdom. They were led by a range of distinguished specialists in their fields and were attended by a total of over 350 museum staff and professionals from other sectors. The colloquia provided the project with insights and options for development which could not have been obtained from published sources. The report is informed throughout by the expertise of those who contributed. Details of the colloquia are given in Appendix 3. The report also draws on a wide range of secondary sources. A list of the principal publications used is given in Appendix 4.

A great debt is owed to the Steering Committee, formed by the then Department of National

Heritage to provide advice and guidance to the project and to Patrick Fallon and Philip Gregory, who managed the Department's contribution to the project. The willingness of the Steering Committee members, all senior professionals in their fields, to debate important issues freely and openly enriched the report and ensured that a broad range of perspectives was represented throughout the process. Any errors of fact or interpretation are, however, mine, and members of the Committee have not been asked individually to endorse every statement in the report. Appendix 1 lists the membership of the Committee; the recommendations of the report are listed in Appendix 2.

Caroline Lang, as Project Coordinator, organised the colloquia, undertook research for the survey of museum education posts and prepared the case studies included in this report. She also managed the administration of the project and frequently drew upon her own extensive experience as a museum educator to take it forward. The project could not have been undertaken without her professionalism and commitment. Esther Boulton and Celia Joicey provided capable administrative assistance. Ann Bonney efficiently typed drafts of the text. Peter Ford created the map on page 47, and Annette Stannett diligently proof-read the final document. I am grateful also to the Director and Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum for enabling me to undertake this project.

While this report defines a vision for the future development of museums, it is securely based on the best of current practice, exemplified by the case studies. The high quality of many individual projects, and the standards of excellence already achieved by museums of all types and sizes in their educational work, provide irrefutable evidence that museums can make a unique and vital contribution to education in the United Kingdom. It should no longer be a matter of debate that every museum can and should achieve these standards.

The 2500 museums in the United Kingdom are a resource for public learning of exceptional educational, social, economic and spiritual value—a common wealth. This wealth is held in trust by museums for the public good, not just for our own time and society but for all times and peoples.

David Anderson
Head of Education
Victoria and Albert Museum
April 1999

A Common Wealth: Summary of the Report

This is the first comprehensive report in the United Kingdom on museum and gallery education. It reviews the current activities of museums as centres for learning and makes recommendations for their future development.

Introduction

Museums and galleries are universal educational institutions of immense expressive power and authority. They hold their resources in trust for all people. They are engaged in what William Morris called ‘the education of desire’ - the stimulation of a wish to enhance the quality of our lives.

Museums in the United Kingdom are fortunate in being surrounded by extraordinary material and non-material cultural wealth. This report endorses a wider definition of a museum as ‘a framed experience rooted in authenticity’, embracing the cultural and natural environment as well as the resources held within the institution itself. Developmental, proactive museums report that for them, education is the golden key, which opens doors to resources of skills, money and facilities in their communities.

Museums have entered a time of change. They are being asked to justify their funding and to define the terms of their contract with society. The cultural sector is one of the fastest growing parts of the economy; it offers opportunities for personal (informal and self-directed) learning that differ from, and complement, the learning provided by the formal education sector. Education provides museums with a renewed purpose and enables them to contribute to cultural development in society.

Museums in Society

The Challenge of the Learning Society

There is extensive debate on the kind of learning needed by the United Kingdom in the twenty first century, if we are to address future challenges. Social exclusion deprives many people of the opportunity to participate actively and creatively in their communities, and a diminishing proportion of the population can identify their place in society in terms of stable and knowable communities. Effective organisations now require staff with highly developed, people-orientated learning skills.

Following publication by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) of *The Learning Age* the emphasis in public education policy has increasingly embraced the concept of lifelong learning. As resource-rich learning environments, museums are well placed to act as catalysts for informal and self-directed learning in a family and community context.

The Emerging Cultural Network

The burgeoning media technologies represent a new world of human experience and behaviour. Recent Government initiatives, including the creation of NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts), the National Grid for Learning and the Public Library Network, offer an exceptional opportunity for museums to contribute to the development of a new cultural network, including museums, at a community and a national level. The value of museums and galleries will become increasingly evident, as the visual, interactive, social and experiential dimensions of the new media replace provision of textual information as the dominant modes.

Museums and Creativity

Culture is dynamic and people-centred and creativity is at the core of the Government's concept of culture. Museums and galleries make three significant contributions to the creative economy and creative communities. First, the sector is a creative industry in its own right. Second, it is an important source of inspiration for other creative industries, such as designers and craftspeople, broadcasters and professionals in the digital media. Third, and perhaps most important, museums and galleries have a crucial role as public learning centres in fostering the creative skills of children and adults, who are the makers and consumers of the present and future.

Responding to the Challenge

Museums and galleries offer a unique kind of learning, based on first-hand experience of authentic objects, works of art and other resources in a public, social environment. They can support cultural literacy for individuals and cultural development for communities. As participatory public spaces, museums and galleries are places for debate; their values and expectations of behaviour help shape those of society as a whole. They can provide ethical leadership, and help children and adults to acquire skills of learning through cultural resources. They also have a responsibility to invest in the future of their communities - particularly by encouraging young people to participate in their activities - as society has invested in museums.

Museum Education Today: Key Findings

Provision for museum and gallery education is a patchwork. The questionnaire surveys for the first edition showed that approximately 50% of museums (usually but not always the smaller institutions) made no deliberate provision for education. 15% made almost none and in the remaining 35% it ranged from basic to comprehensive. Where it existed, such provision may be available to only a small percentage of audiences in a particular category. Over the last decade, many museums have made strenuous efforts to enhance their educational work and the number of museum education posts has doubled. But only one in five museums have an education specialist on their staff.

Most museum managers say that education is in the second order of their priorities, after collections management and display. Some audiences, such as schools, children in family groups and local adults, are more likely to receive education services than others, such as students, young people, minority communities or tourists. In most museums, provision for lifelong learning remains an aspiration rather than a reality.

The low level of provision for public learning in the United Kingdom's museums is a waste of a vital public resource. Achieving a consistent professional standard for public learning is a critical challenge which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The report, therefore, proposes twelve targets for development of museums: four relate to the institution, four to the public and four to the creation of a national framework.

Twelve targets for development of museums learning

The Institution

Target 1: The museum's educational mission

Few museums include education in their mission statements. To become centres for learning, museums themselves need to become learning organisations with education central to their purpose. This requires the leadership of museum management and their governing bodies, who have direct responsibility for educational development.

Target 2: The museum as a learning resource

Three main types of provision for learning - exhibits, programmes and facilities for self-directed learning - define a museum. All three must be engaged if museums are to develop their whole public dimension for learning, using new technologies where appropriate.

Increasingly, museums are involving the public as partners as well as targets in development of services.

Target 3: A skilled workforce

All staff contribute in some way to a museum's education work, and only one in four of the museum staff who deliver education services is a specialist educator. The report recommends that each museum or group of museums should employ a specialist to lead its educational development, and should foster the educational capabilities of staff, volunteers and all who work in or for them, both those who are trained educators and those who help to deliver services. A much greater investment is required if museums are to be effective as they should be as educational institutions. In addition, the report proposes that the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation, when reviewing its standards of competence and qualifications should include a unit or units on museum education in the mandatory framework of all museum qualifications.

Target 4: Research and evaluation

Research and evaluation of public learning needs to become an integral part of museum practice. Few museums evaluate the educational effectiveness of their galleries or other services, conduct learning research, or study the educational work of other museums, yet investment in these activities could significantly enhance the effectiveness of museums. The report recommends that museums should make educational research and evaluation a high priority and should be supported in this by an independent research committee which sets a national research agenda; in addition, one or more higher education institutions should establish centres for museum learning to encourage the development of research and teaching in the field.

The Public

Target 5: Lifelong learning

Museums can contribute to every stage of educational development. They should support lifelong learning through both informal learning and formal education, from early childhood, through families, at work and in the third age. The community provides an important framework for lifelong learning, and must now be the focus for audience development. The report recommends that museums should identify their audience priorities and direct educational provision where it can be most effective at reaching target groups.

Target 6: Open museums

Museums can open themselves to the widest possible audience by using strategies for access, participation and for progression of learning. At present, half of the population of the United Kingdom rarely or never use museums, but the levels of participation vary greatly from area to area, depending in part upon the efforts made by individual museums to encourage participation. Provision for learning is the most effective strategy for reaching new audiences, and the report proposes that it should be deployed more effectively to overcome barriers to inclusion.

Target 7: Engaging other educators

The effective use of museums as a learning resource by educational institutions depends in part on teachers and other educators as well as museums themselves. Development of their skills would significantly enhance student learning, yet very few receive training in learning through museums. Initiatives are needed at both local and national levels. Therefore, the report recommends that the Government should ask public bodies with responsibility for curricula and assessment, teacher and lecturer – training and the inspection of schools and other educational institutions to encourage, enhance and monitor the use of museums as a learning resource.

Target 8: Partnerships

Partnerships extend the boundaries of what is possible, and local authorities in particular can play an enabling role in helping museums to collaborate with different agencies and institutions which share museum objectives. The report recommends that museums should seek partnerships with other agencies and institutions, especially libraries, archives and the broadcasting media, as well as formal education institutions.

National development**Target 9: Adequate provision throughout the United Kingdom**

Participation in museums should be an entitlement of citizenship. If museum learning is to be available in every area of the country, museums will need support from Area Museum Councils (AMCs) and from museums with well-established education services. Each museum or group of museums needs an education specialist to lead development, but in addition there is an urgent requirement for AMCs to provide more expert educational advice, training programmes, grants and other support. To do so effectively, they need to employ their own specialist advisory staff, and should develop their own educational policies and plans.

Target 10: A national framework

If education is to be established as a central purpose of museums of all sizes and types, an infrastructure is required to support development at a national level. The Government and the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC) can take a lead in this, with the support of other agencies. For this it is vital that MLAC should employ a full-time educator at a senior level with support to develop and implement a new educational policy and plan. In addition, the Government should establish a Standing Committee on museum and gallery education or on education through the cultural sector.

Target 11: Investment

Museums need to commit the resources to education that are required for growth. Such investment will help to attract additional resources of expertise and funding, as well as a complementary investment of time and support from the public, voluntary organisations, trusts and foundations. But this alone will not be sufficient to achieve the scale of change in quality and level of public provision. The report recommends that Lottery funding should be used to establish a national and regional infrastructure of support and to expand services at a local level.

Target 12: Advocacy

Museums have the potential to enrich many aspects of national life. They need to articulate their value to society as educational institutions, to local and national Government, to other sectors, and to independent policy and research bodies, if they are to play a more effective part in society. In addition, the report recommends that the Museums Association (MA), the Association of Independent Museums (AIM), the Group for Education in Museums (GEM) and the National Association for Gallery Education (ENGAGE) should promote the value of museums as educational institutions inside and outside the museum sector.

Conclusions

Museums find their voice through their educational work. They are at the beginning of a process of fundamental change into centres for public learning that could take them, together with other cultural institutions, to the centre of public policy.

Introduction

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines a museum as ‘a non-profit-making, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment’. A European Forum organised by the Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) in 1998 proposed an alternative definition, ‘a framed experience rooted in authenticity’.

Museums at their finest are universal educational institutions of immense expressive power and authority. They communicate with us across boundaries of language, culture and time, and suggest comparisons which illuminate our experience of the present. The objects and works of art which they display embody the ways of life, ideas, values and spirit of those who created them. Through museums, we have direct contact with peoples of all ages and cultures, experience the unimaginable variety of the natural world and expand our understanding of what it means to be human.

By relating contemporary societies to the forces that have shaped - and are continuing to shape - them, museums demonstrate that all cultures are subject to evolution. They also stimulate in us a critical awareness of our own beliefs and identity, and a respect for those of others.

Museums show that the capacity to make judgements is not only unavoidable but desirable, yet they also reveal that there are shared human values which unite people of different cultures. If we were asked to justify human existence, many of the examples we might choose, from all ages and cultures, are celebrated in museums.

These fragmentary survivors are also evidence of the fragility of human culture and the natural environment. No previous generation has had such power over the natural world, nor exercised such a threat to it. Museums can educate the public about the place of humanity in the environment and the nature of the physical universe; they can speak directly to the public about global development and change, and can develop an awareness of the need for diversity and sustainability.

Museums prompt an appreciation of the ethical and moral dimension of life. Museums are a spiritual resource for many of us, whatever our beliefs, who want contact with something beyond ourselves.

The educational purpose of museums

The philosopher Michael Oakeshott has defined learning as ‘acquiring the ability to feel and think’, which he believed can only be acquired by listening for and recognising these abilities in the conduct and utterances of others. Learning suffuses almost every moment of our daily lives. However, human cultures have developed only because people also have an innate capacity to teach – or educate – as well as learn. Education is undertaken with varying degrees of skill by many members of society including parents, other relatives, friends, colleagues at work, and fellow members of clubs and societies, as well as by professional educators.

‘Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do to make sense of the world. It may involve an increase in skills, knowledge or understanding, a deepening of values or the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and a desire to learn more.’

Campaign for Learning, 1998

Museums are public centres for collections, scholarship, expertise and skills, which are rich and distinctive educational resources. These resources exist because society values museums and is prepared to support them financially. Therefore, museums have a duty to make their resources available to all potential users. The delivery of these resources in ways appropriate to the needs of all learners is the business of museum education and museum educators.

Museums hold their resources in trust for all people, including those people in the past whose skills and creativity produced these objects, specimens and works of art; individuals and groups today who might use museum resources for the public good; and future generations who may need them to nourish and develop their own societies.

Museums are educational institutions in their own right and not because of any services they may provide to other educational institutions. Education is intrinsic to the nature of museums. Their educational mission drives every activity; it is an integral part of the work of all staff and an element in the experience of every museum user. Unless museums make provision for education purposefully and with commitment, they are not truly museums.

Museums are engaged in what William Morris called ‘the education of desire’ – the stimulation of a wish to enhance the quality of our lives. They allow us to learn through our senses,

especially sight, hearing and touch, in ways that give us pleasure. They develop our feelings as well as our powers of perception, analysis, ethical awareness, imagination and creativity.

Museums must be sensitive to the richness and diversity of the society of which they are part, but should also offer us a vision of society as it could be.

In the nineteenth century, it was a growing awareness of the power of objects and works of art to educate people's hearts and minds that persuaded many local communities to found their own public museums. In doing so, towns and cities throughout the United Kingdom developed a new and dynamic relationship between learning and culture in a way that could not be achieved through a school or university.

Following the success of the Great Exhibition in 1851, the museum movement developed from a series of isolated initiatives into a major instrument of public educational policy for the achievement of social and economic improvement. Collaborations quickly developed at a local level between museums, libraries, the new schools of art and science and other educational institutions.

'Systems in evolution need a memory, and societies are evolving systems. Museums are part of the collective memory of human beings: they are not the collective memory, but they may well be the leading element in societies' collective memory.

There are those who claim that museums are mostly for fun, or that preservation of artefacts from the past is an end in itself. We argue that museums are in the service of society and consequently must offer both learning and entertainment, but the single most important objective of memory is to help us learn, as individuals and in society'.

Swedish Parliamentary Commission on Museums, 1994.

In due course, however, central Government put its faith instead in the formal education sector to educate the population as workers and citizens. Without a unifying vision of universal public education to bind them, museums and other local institutions gradually went in different directions. As the state education system expanded in the twentieth century, so the concept of public learning in museums diminished. Increasingly, museum education was seen as a limited

specialist service, usually for schools, with little connection to other museum work, rather than the main purpose of all museum activities. This conceptual confusion remains widespread in the museum sector, and dogs discussion of museum education to this day.

An expanded concept of museums

Museums, like many other public institutions, have now entered a time of change in the assumptions and principles which shape their development. With increasing clarity and insistence, those who fund museums are asking them to demonstrate that society as a whole is benefiting from the investment that it makes. Museums can no longer justify their existence, as many have done in the past, principally in terms of the care and display of their collections.

Museums in the United Kingdom are fortunate in being surrounded by extraordinary cultural wealth: natural landscapes and human environments shaped by millennia of use, richly distinctive regional and ethnic identities, youth cultures of enormous vitality, and the capacity to produce manufactured and handmade goods of high quality. The balance and perfection of the best of daily life can itself be a major cultural achievement. All of this depends as much upon non-material culture –the shared values, ideologies, oral traditions, rituals, ethical standards and beliefs that give meaning and symbolic significance to our material world – as it does upon material culture consisting of objects and works of art, specimens and sites. No culture can be adequately represented in museums by material evidence alone. This is particularly true of societies with strong oral traditions, such as Gaelic Scotland and many non-Western societies.

‘This highway of archangels, this theatre of heaven, the lightgarden of the angel king’

Inscription on a memorial to the Emperor Babur near Kabul, 1640

This report takes the ICOM definition of a museum as its starting point. However, the report endorses the view of the many people now working in museums, who are unwilling to limit the boundary of a museum to the walls of the institution. They believe that their collections form an integral part of a wider concept of museums, which includes their cultural and natural environment. For example, for some natural historians, the future of the living landscape has an importance equal to the display of specimens in galleries; they regard their educational

work in the two environments as complementary rather than in conflict. Likewise, many social historians value the material and non-material resources of their communities as living parts of their museums' collections.

This expanded concept of museums is in harmony with a philosophy of museum learning that defines it as a collaborative process involving both public and staff. The implication for museums, profound in its consequences, is that museum education is not what museums do with their objects to people, but a process of individual and community development drawing upon the full range of community and institutional resources, to which both the public and museum staff contribute as partners.

Museum collections need education to turn them to good purpose. It is culture in action, the uses of culture for learning, which define the quality of a museum and a society. It is the responsibility of museums and galleries to help each generation to re-engage with the cultural energy embodied in their collections or presented in their exhibitions, and to contribute to what Michael Oakeshott described as 'a public conversation across the ages'.

'We need a kind of integrated transport system for learning, with clear routes and signposts connecting the community to the rich learning opportunities provided by museums.'

Bill Lucas, Director of the Campaign for Learning, 1999.

For developmental, proactive museums, public learning is the golden key. It provides them with a rationale and an ethical purpose they now require. As well as enriching visitors' experience of the collections, attracting more diverse audiences and increasing attendances, education also opens the door for museums to the latent resources of skills, money and facilities that exist in their communities. It enables them to engage and influence local agencies and institutions, and to place themselves at the centre of arts, leisure, education, tourism and commercial networks. It offers them a leading role in shaping the cultural development and economic re-generation of their areas which in turn generates wider community support, greater interest from sponsors and the media and increased political influence.

By making education the *raison d'être* of all their activities, museums can both reaffirm the purpose for which they were first created, and meet the challenge of the learning society which the United Kingdom is becoming.

‘Without education there can be no culture’

Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998

The last few years have witnessed a remarkable revolution in cultural and educational policy, a transformation led by Government but reflecting deep social and technological changes in our society. For the first time in this century, the cultural sector has a comprehensive strategy for development, supported by a rationale which has public learning and creativity at its centre. At the same time the education sector has embraced the concept of lifelong learning beyond formal education, in the home and the community. Both sectors now value and share as a common objective the development of lifelong learning through cultural resources.

Museums have entered the learning age.



Children as guides for the ‘Claustrophobia’ exhibition at the Ikon Gallery, June 1998
(Photo: Ikon Gallery)

The Challenge of the Learning Society

There is extensive debate within business and industry, the education and training sectors, community organisations and Government on the kind of learning needed by the United Kingdom in the twenty-first century, if we are to address future social, economic and technological challenges. Society is changing, and museums, if they are to serve society, need to respond to these changes.

‘Most business is about working through and with people and that’s about learning. It’s not about fact. You can tell people a truth until they’re blue in the face, but unless they’re interested in it and believe it, and find it emotionally assimilable, they won’t accept it. You learn through the arts.

To cope with a changing world, we need people of imagination, creativity and vision and with the self-confidence to adapt. That’s why I believe so passionately that it doesn’t matter precisely where the talents of our people are, so long as it’s recognised that everyone has some talent. The job of the educator is to find it’.

John Harvey-Jones, industrialist, 1995

Social Change

In 1944, Beveridge identified five great evils – the giants of want, idleness, ignorance, squalor and disease – that society must overcome. Today, we might add a sixth, cultural exclusion, which existed fifty years ago, and which continues to deprive many people of the opportunity to participate actively and creatively in their communities. Our society, while generally more affluent, has also become more atomised and more sharply divided. The last two decades have seen the emergence of a ‘second nation’, a substantial minority which includes a disproportionate number of young people and adults whose lives are blighted by recurrent unemployment, poor housing, poor health and drug-related crime. One in three children now lives in poverty and in consequence suffers significant educational disadvantage from birth. These divisions are reflected in museum audiences.

A diminishing proportion of the population can identify their place in society in terms of stable and knowable communities. As a consequence of economic change, some localities themselves have altered beyond recognition since the last war. In the United Kingdom, as throughout Europe, federal, regional and minority identities are competing with traditional allegiances to

the nation state. Intercommunal and racial tensions continue in some areas, while minority groups demand recognition and respect for their distinctive values and ways of life. There is a growing acceptance that the United Kingdom is a pluralistic society, but also a recognition of the need to develop greater cultural literacy and tolerance if the balance between pluralism and identity is to be sustained.

Fifty years ago, cultural exclusion may not have been perceived by policy makers as a serious evil. Today it bars the way to many of our cultural and educational institutions. Cultural exclusion has become an increasingly urgent issue for museums, and education one of the most powerful weapons against it.

Changes in the workplace

The emergence of the global market has resulted in a radical reappraisal of the importance of training and development at the workplace. The Japanese academic Fukio Kodama has spoken of a change in the corporation from being a 'place for production' to a 'place for thinking', and leading industrialists in the United Kingdom are emphasising the need for a workforce that is flexible, adaptive, imaginative and capable of working with a range of people from all backgrounds. Civic institutions have found that public support is increasingly uncertain and that they must build relationships of trust, a development which requires additional learning skills on the part of professionals, community groups and voluntary organisations alike.

Effective organisations require staff with highly developed, people-oriented learning skills, of the kind that the arts are particularly well able to develop. For such organisations, as Sir Christopher Ball, Director of Learning at the Royal Society for the Arts, said in 1995, 'Learning pays, and nothing much else does today'.

Developments in educational policy and practice

For many years, public educational policy was based on the assumption that, for the majority of the population, the most important learning took place in the classroom. In recent decades, understanding of the processes of learning and education has changed beyond recognition. Today, learning is seen as a lifelong process, growing out of our everyday experience, to which formal education at school and college and training at work contribute. Informal learning, the kind that begins at birth and develops throughout life through social interaction with other people, provides the foundation for all other learning.

How adults prefer to learn

A study in 1998 of over 1000 adults conducted for the Campaign for Learning found that most adults are currently engaged in learning, and a significant majority (more than half the adult population) are doing so outside the formal education system. People feel much more positively about learning which they associate with discovering, finding out and enjoyment, than they do about education which they associate principally with school.

93% of adults say they enjoy learning new things, and 90% think that learning is personally important to them. A majority (56%) see the benefits of learning in terms of personal development and improving the quality of their lives rather than improved work performance, salary or prospects. When asked the places where they felt they personally learnt most, 57% mentioned the home and 49% either libraries or museums, but only 29% mentioned college or university and 11% school.

The most popular methods of learning identified by the adults sampled were doing practical things, studying or practising on their own, and exchanging ideas and information with others. Formal teaching with instruction from a tutor or teacher was significantly less popular. As yet relatively few people prefer to use computers as a learning tool (23% mentioned CD-Rom/computer software packages and 11% the Internet).

Also evident is the significance of the differences in the ways that people learn. This may depend upon their cultural background, the varied strengths of their multiple types of intelligence, and their preferred learning styles. Some prefer to perceive through sensing and feeling, others through thinking; some to process these experiences through actively doing, others through observing; some to learn alone, others to learn in a group. These characteristics of human learning have significant implications for public educational policy. One is the importance of support for families and communities, the source of much informal learning. Another is the need for institutions, such as museums, which can cater for such diverse ways of learning.

Industry, the government and many individual members of the public in the United Kingdom now recognise the importance of lifelong learning. We are currently witnessing an explosive

development of learning, particularly among adults, that has no precedent in this century. More than one half of all adults in the United Kingdom are now deliberately engaged in learning. Of these, most are learning independently of formal educational institutions. Especially significant is that a far higher proportion of adults from ethnic minorities are engaged in study than of the rest of the population. People say they learn most in their homes and communities, and their main learning resource is the cultural sector (the media, libraries and museums), not formal education.

The expansion in formal education and training has also been dramatic. The last Government demonstrated its commitment to a learning workforce by setting national targets for lifetime vocational learning, and for participation in higher education. Between 1990 and 1995 the number of students increased by one million to four million, and the proportion of young people now entering higher education increased to one in three.

Education will be the key industry for developed countries in the twenty-first century. Open and distance-learning has developed considerably over the last 10-15 years to meet the need of adults for more flexible forms of learning. The formal education sector has responded well to the demands that are being made on it, but cannot meet the needs of all learners. There is great potential for development of informal and self-directed learning approaches of the kind that museums could offer.

The need for a learning society

The Royal Society for the Arts (RSA), the Open University (OU), the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC), the Training and Enterprise National Council (TEC) and individual TECs and Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) are just some of the organisations to have urged that learning, both formal and informal, in education and training, should be recognised as a fundamental connective purpose in the life of every citizen, and that we must become a learning society. A learning society has been defined by the SCEC as one 'whose citizens value, support and engage in learning, as a matter of course, in all areas of activity'.

We need to make a distinction between a learning society, a knowledge society and an information society. Information, like sand, is the low-skill raw material of the future. Aided by technology, an information society simply adds more and more sand to the heap. With knowledge, however, the sand can be turned into a beautiful glass to drink from, enjoy, share or sell. But it requires learning to make an even better glass to meet future, changing circumstances. Clearly, it is a learning society that we need. The previous Government's policy

document *Lifetime Learning*, published in 1996, stressed the importance of partnership and promoted the concept of Learning Cities, Towns and Communities, an idea many are now taking up.

Museums and how people learn

The work of some influential researchers on human learning is of particular relevance to museum education.

Lev Vygotsky and later Jerome Bruner both ascribed particular importance to culture and culture artefacts, in material and non-material form, across all fields of human activity. Vygotsky believed that language and instruction are essential for the inheritance and transformation of culture. Bruner believed that one of the main purposes of instruction is not to communicate facts but to introduce children or adults to the distinctive skills and methodologies of subject disciplines through observation and apprenticeship with practitioners. The work of Bruner and Vygotsky suggests that museums can be of great value in the learning process, provided that they are used actively to develop understanding and practice of relevant disciplines.

Howard Gardner believes that there are at least seven human intelligences - linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily kinaesthetic, inter-personal and intra-personal - and possibly also a spiritual intelligence. His theory of multiple intelligences helps to explain why people learn, remember, perform and understand in different ways according to the strengths of those intelligences. He points out that the education system (at least in the USA) is biased towards linguistic and logical-mathematical modes. Gardner believes that science centres and museums have a vital and complementary role to play in children's education, and advocates in *The Unschooled Mind* that all children should attend an intensive museum programme rather than, or in addition to, schools. He also believes that the informal, enjoyable, contextualised environment of the museum and the apprenticeship model of learning are more relevant to the needs of today's children than the de-contextualised environment and formal methods of the school.

Self-directed learners represent what Stephen Brookfield has described as a vast 'parallel universe' of people who learn mainly or entirely outside the formal education sector, at home or through a club, society or voluntary organisations.

Instead of working to a fixed curriculum, self-directed learners take the initiative in deciding their own learning programmes according to their own interests.

Brookfield found that the most successful self-directed learners developed their knowledge through learning networks rather than in isolation, were extrinsically-orientated and saw themselves as part of a wider learning community. Casual oral transmission was of greater value to them than lectures, and they in turn, provided specialist advice and mentoring to unskilled newcomers. Self-directed learners are of great significance to museums. They are probably disproportionately represented among existing visitors, and may be the main source of active public support for many institutions, particularly those independent museums which rely upon the skills of unpaid but knowledgeable volunteers. Museums in turn are ideal centres for self-directed learning.

Research into experiential learning by David Kolb, Bernice McCarthy and others suggests that people can be divided into those who prefer to perceive concretely through sensing/feeling, or alternatively through thinking. They may then prefer to process these new experiences actively through doing, or reflectively through watching. These differences can be related to the dominance of either the right brain (to which is attributed concrete, non-rational, intuitive and non-verbal thought) or the left brain (to which is attributed abstract, rational, analytical and verbal thought). Experiential learning theory has become very influential in museum education because museums are flexible enough to be designed to suit many different learning styles.

David Goleman, drawing on recent research on the human brain, argued that our emotions play a far greater role in thought, decision-making and individual success than is commonly acknowledged. His definition of emotional intelligence includes self-awareness and impulse control, persistence, zeal and motivation, empathy and social deftness, and he has identified a range of educational approaches which can be used to foster it. Museums and galleries, as experiential spaces, can encourage learning through engagement with feelings.

Building upon the Dearing report on higher education, the Kennedy report on further education and the Fryer report on lifelong learning, the publication in 1998 of the new Government's Green Paper on lifelong learning, *The Learning Age*, was a defining point in public policy on education. It drew together within a framework of lifelong learning the strands of formal education in schools, colleges and adult education institutions, work-based training, and informal and self-directed learning in the family and community.

The Paper proposed a number of significant initiatives, which will shift the balance of public provision for learning decisively away from the rigid, supply-side model of the past, and towards individual choice and responsibility for learning in a diversity of contexts in and beyond the community.

The Learning Age: Key Proposals

The Green Paper set out the Government's proposals for creating a new 'learning age' to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. These include:

- Learning Direct, a national telephone helpline with advice on learning;
- The University for Industry which will open by early 2000;
- Individual Learning Accounts which will encourage people to save to learn;
- Places for an extra 500,000 people in further education and higher education by 2002;
- Investment in young people, particularly those at risk of dropping out from learning;
- Doubling help for basic literacy and numeracy skills among adults to involve over 500,000 adults a year by 2002;
- Widening participation in and access to learning in all its forms;
- Raising standards across teaching and learning in further, higher and adult education;
- Building a qualification system which is easily understood and gives equal value to academic and vocational learning;
- Increasing take up of the Investors in People initiative in small businesses;
- Setting up of the National Grid for Learning by 2002.

The present Government came into office in 1997 with a strong education remit. It declared that its priorities were ‘education, education, education’. As policies have evolved, these priorities could now be restated as ‘formal education, informal learning and self-directed learning’. Personal learning in all its forms runs through the work of museums and all other cultural institutions. It defines their central purpose and the unique contribution they can make to society in the new century.

The importance of museums in the twenty-first century

If the United Kingdom is to harness the learning potential of the whole population, it will need to coordinate the efforts of the formal education sector with the public’s desire to engage in informal and self-directed learning. Museums have a distinctive role to play in the development of a skilled and creative workforce, and in satisfying the public need for learning for leisure and enjoyment. The strengths of museums, particularly the opportunity they provide for learning actively through the senses from primary cultural sources, complement and enhance those of the formal education sector. As resource-rich learning environments, they are well placed to support informal and self-directed learning by individual families and other social groups.

‘As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual sides of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us to fulfil our potential and open doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings.

We have inherited the legacy of the great self-help movements of the Victorian industrial communities. Men and women, often living in desperate poverty, were determined to improve themselves and their families. Learning enriched their lives and they, in turn, enriched the whole of society.

The Learning Age will be built on a renewed commitment to self-improvement and on recognition of the enormous contribution learning makes to our society’.

David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, 1998

The Emerging Cultural Network

'For the first time we have the opportunity to link all our learning institutions and providers - including schools, colleges, universities, libraries, adult learning institutions, museums and galleries - and more, to link them purposefully to an agenda for developing the learning society. To achieve a learning society, these links must extend in an effective way to homes, the workplace, hospitals, the high street and the street corner in the same way that public utilities like the telephone are now universally available'.

Department for Education and Employment, Connecting the Learning Society, 1997

The burgeoning media technologies represent a new world of human experience and behaviour. A key change in technology is the shift from physical 'atoms' to electronic 'bits'. Associated with this change are a host of others. Control of media production and with it, control of the learning process, is moving from the traditional producers to consumers, from transmitters to receivers, from teachers to learners. Computers, already capable of some perception, are becoming multi-sensory, responding subtly to human behaviour, by changing services and environments. As Nicholas Negroponte, Director of the MIT Media Lab in Boston, has suggested, in the post-information age, we often have to deal with an audience the size of one.

New media technologies offer the prospect of a significant expansion of distance-learning provision through cultural resources. Yet the development of these technologies will, without doubt, also reduce control of knowledge by public institutions. Documented images will be 'hot' resources, as students seek authentic learning material in an accessible, flexible form. Once data has left the museum and become available digitally, it may be beyond copyright protection, especially in the huge deregulated zone of informal digital learning.

Digital media packages at present are often imaginatively, aesthetically, symbolically and educationally impoverished, and many websites provide only factual information. This will almost certainly change. The new technologies offer exceptional opportunities for individual and social learning. They already enable people to choose when and where learning will take place, and in time may offer people kinds of learning that are not better or worse, but qualitatively different, from those available from other sources. Within the last few years, some cultural institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts have begun to explore

the potential of digital media as an art form, providing a showcase for exciting new work by leading practitioners from a range of creative industries including architecture, design, film and the graphic arts.

The cheapness of the digital resources available on-line contrasts with the cost of the hardware and software needed to gain access to them. It is possible that the expected convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications and other digital services may in time bring interactive learning media within the personal reach of almost every person in Europe and every community in the developing world. There is, equally, a serious risk that a divide will open up in our society between those who have access to the best learning resources and those who do not. This divide will persist through each new wave of technological development. The same divide could emerge between large and small public institutions in the cultural sector, including museums.

These possibilities raise issues of public access to cultural resources. Such dangers can only be avoided if there is a concerted national effort to establish as many free digital learning centres as possible in and through public institutions. It is also vital that the skills of creative use of digital media, which museums and galleries are ideally placed to develop among their users, should be spread as widely as possible throughout society.

The Government's strategy for digital learning

The Government policy statement, *Our Information Age* (1998), defined its vision for development of the use of digital media to transform education, widen access, promote competitiveness, foster quality and modernise government in the United Kingdom. The most important elements of the Government's strategy for digital learning are:

The National Grid for Learning, which will provide a network for schools and other educational institutions to gain access to quality learning resources through the Internet, and establish links with libraries, museums and broadcasters and other partners. As its contribution to the Grid the Government is creating public educational websites, and has established the British Educational Communications Technology Agency (BECTA) to lead its development. The Grid will also provide an architecture of interconnecting networks linked to other providers.

Community Access to Lifelong Learning. This initiative has been developed in response to evidence that many adults find it hard to gain access to activity that is too formal or is provided in too conventional an educational setting. It will support the development of a nationwide network of learning centres with ICT access. In particular, it will develop Community Grids for Learning and the Public Library Network and contribute to the development of the University for Industry. The learning centres will be located in libraries, museums and galleries, community centres, supermarkets, schools and colleges and other accessible venues.

The **Public Library Network** is a programme to develop the IT infrastructure required to link the UK's 4,000 public libraries to each other, to the National Grid for Learning and to the University for Industry. It will enable them to provide a wide range of on-line services for members of the public and to develop new digitised material. The initiative is underpinned by a programme of ICT training for all public library staff. The Government is setting the objective that every public library should, where practicable, be connected to the National Grid for Learning by 2002.

Community Grids for Learning will enable local authorities and communities to develop on-line community resources linking educational, library, leisure and other services at local, metropolitan and regional level. This content will be created and disseminated by local providers, including museums and galleries.

The **University for Industry** will be an organisation for open and distance-learning which will complement traditional learning mechanisms by using new technology to make learning available to adults at work, at home or at local learning centres. It has two strategic objectives: to stimulate demand for lifelong learning amongst businesses and individuals, in order to equip the country with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to compete in the global economy; and to promote the availability of, and improve access to, relevant, high quality and innovative learning, in particular through the use of information and communications technology.

IT for All is a Government-led programme specifically focused on adults not being targeted by other initiatives. It aims to raise awareness, provide access and develop skills in the use of digital technology. Working with public and private sector partners, by the beginning of 1999 the Government had established a nationwide

network of 4000 IT for All access sites, including 2000 learning centres to provide very basic training for those who have no experience of using computers.

A Framework for Electronic Commerce. The Government wants the United Kingdom to be a leader in the development of electronic commerce. It will aim to achieve this through the operation of four guiding principles: technology neutrality, so that organisations engaged in electronic commerce are not disadvantaged; security of electronic transactions; protection of intellectual property; and cutting red tape.

A Framework for Digital Broadcasting. The launch of digital broadcasting has brought the prospect of more channels, better quality sound and pictures and new kinds of services for viewers and listeners, including interactivity and access to the Internet. The Government is establishing a framework which aims to ensure universal access to a range of high quality information, education and entertainment services whilst safeguarding copyright and encouraging commercial developments.

Improving Public Services. The Government will use telephones, interactive television and multimedia kiosks in public places to provide information on public services. Its goal is to have 25% of Government services accessible electronically by 2002.

The 24 Hour Museum. Jointly developed by the Campaign for Museums and the MDA, with funding from DCMS, *The 24 Hour Museum* is an internet project for the public to provide a gateway to all UK museums and galleries, with a news page, a gazetteer and search facilities, and innovative educational resources.

Within the cultural sector it is libraries that have responded most rapidly to the new opportunities for public learning offered by the emergence of new digital media. The Library and Information Commission (LIC) report *New Library: The People's Network* (1998) recommended that the Government should create a managed public libraries digital network through public/private sector partnerships. In response, the Government agreed to provide £50 million from the New Opportunities Fund for creation of content to be made available through the network and the National Grid for Learning by libraries, archives, museums and other providers and a further £20 million so that all public library staff can be trained in ICT use.

A subsequent LIC report, *Building the New Library Network* (1998), set out the proposals for development for consideration by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). This recommended that the educational priority should be to support projects aimed at self-directed and informal learning. The report also recommended that priority be given in the content funded by NOF to three social policy objectives: cultural enrichment; the modernisation of Government and the encouragement of active citizenship; and reskilling the nation in verbal, visual and creative literacies. So far, the only comparable museum-led initiative is *The 24 Hour Museum* which is designed to provide an accessible museum gateway to the Internet for the public. In addition, the Heritage Lottery Fund supports projects which use ICT to improve public access to our understanding of the heritage, and which promote its preservation.

The emergence of these new public learning networks has raised some important issues for museums and galleries which go to the heart of their role as institutions for public learning. One is the tension between educational purpose and commercial interest: on the one hand, museums have a fundamental responsibility to help and encourage a wider public to gain access to and use museum resources as actively and creatively as possible; on the other, they have a legitimate interest in the protection for commercial and public purposes of copyright on their collections and of intellectual property rights on the creativity of their staff.

A second, equally fundamental, issue concerns the strategic role of museums in development (with the library sector, broadcasters and the performing arts) of a new cultural network. In this, museums can complement the work of the public library sector. Traditionally, libraries have been distributors of information created by others, rather than generators of creative content themselves.

Museums, on the other hand, have had from their beginning a direct and active educational role. Holding copyright on most of their collections, they have expertise in the interpretation of primary cultural resources and in the processes of informal and self-directed learning. The value of museums will become increasingly evident in future, as digital media becomes an art form rather than a technology, and as the visual, interactive, social and experiential dimensions of the media - which are public characteristics they share with galleries and museums - replace provision of textual information as the dominant modes of digital learning.

The development of the Internet has opened new international markets for the UK's creative industries and will create huge opportunities for self-directed and distance-learning from museum resources across the globe. The United Kingdom is fortunate in having highly

developed expertise in adult learning, open and distance-learning and museum learning. It also has a remarkable depth of talent in the use of digital technologies in the arts, museum and gallery collections of great richness and cultural diversity, and an existing reputation in educational broadcasting that is recognised worldwide. With these advantages, and the widespread use of English in international communications, there is potential for rapid development for export of on-line learning resources based on cultural material held by museums.

‘Education is an enormous commercial market. It’s not outside the commercial world, it’s one of the biggest global markets of the next century. One of the strongest focuses of technology will be education.’

Horace Mitchell, multimedia consultant, 1995

New media technologies present an increasingly sophisticated challenge to museums. Faced with competition from the simulations developed by their rivals, museums may begin to use these technologies to develop ‘living’ galleries - ones that are more affective, interactive, responsive to individual needs, and capable of becoming temporarily and locally personalised. Some museums may also introduce networked study bases, and portable digital guides.

The Government is encouraging museums and galleries to make more extensive use of new technologies on-site and to create learning resources for dissemination through the National Grid for Learning and other networks to schools, colleges, libraries and other public sites. Museum learning could within a few years become ubiquitous, spreading out to homes, commercial centres, education institutions and independent study groups throughout the UK and beyond. It is probable that technology will not undermine but stimulate the public’s desire to have a gallery experience; the ‘virtuality’ offered by new media may balance and complement, rather than erode, the ‘actuality’ that is to be found in real human relationships and contact with authentic objects in museums.

These developments could transform not just museum services, but the very nature of museums as institutions. The communication channels opened by digital technologies will lead museums out into society but, even more, they will bring into museums all the diverse needs, capabilities, and demands of the communities around them.

Museums and Creativity

Heritage can be a static and object-based concept. Culture is dynamic and people-centred. Creativity is at the core of the Government's concept of culture. Soon after the 1997 General Election DCMS established a Creative Industries Task Force, chaired by the Secretary of State, Chris Smith, and bringing together for the first time Ministers from right across Government as well as senior representatives from industry. Its aim was to consider the steps that were needed to support sustainable economic growth in the creative industries. At the same time, the Government commissioned a committee, chaired by Professor Ken Robinson, to report on the development of creativity and cultural education through the schools sector. This report was published in June 1999.

'The creative industries are those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skills and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.'

Creative Industries Task Force, 1997

Museums in the creative economy

The sectors identified by the Creative Industries Task Force as contributing to the creative economy were: advertising, architecture, the arts and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing software, and television and radio. The work of the Task Force fell into two strands. The first was to undertake a mapping exercise to identify current activity in each growth; the second was to identify the key issues which are vital to the economic health of the creative sector as a whole and particular industries within it.

Significantly this was the first time such a mapping exercise had been undertaken for the creative industries. The results were published in 1998 in *Creative Industries Mapping Document 1998*, a landmark publication. The Task Group found that the creative industries generate revenues approaching £60 billion a year, contribute 4% to the domestic economy and employ around 1½ million people. The sector is growing twice as fast as the economy as a whole.

Museums and galleries were not included in the list of creative industries. With a workforce of perhaps 50,000 people, and a turnover of approximately half a billion pounds per annum, the

museum and gallery sector is not one of this country's richest creative industries. Yet museums and galleries are important centres for creativity. Museum exhibitions are themselves works of art. Many of the staff employed in them have been trained in creative industries or are required to achieve high levels of creativity in devising and producing displays, learning programmes and publications for the public.

Museums and galleries have, however, another significance. They are also used as a source of inspiration by designers, craftspeople, the fashion industry, broadcasting media, the performing arts and professionals in the digital media. One in five of all users of the Victoria and Albert Museum, for example, are students, many of whom within a few years will themselves be working in the creative industries.

The creative economy is a complex and dynamic self-generating mechanism, to which museums and galleries contribute significantly. That this is not fully recognised at present is mainly the result of the sector's own perception and presentation of itself, and the low priority it gave until recently to its public role and responsibilities in society. This is a challenge the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Council will need to address.

A start has already been made by the British Council and the Department of Trade and Industry in consultation with the DCMS, which are exploring the potential for export of UK heritage services. Expertise in learning from cultural resources is one of the strengths of the United Kingdom, and will be a critical requirement in the global development of digital learning media over the next decade.

'Culture and creativity are vital to our national life. We have long seen the value which creative people bring to our lives, through the employment of their skills and the exercise of their imagination. Their activities enrich us all, bringing us pleasure and broadening our horizons.'

Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998

Fostering public creativity

The personal and social value of creativity is as important as its economic value. There are many different definitions of creativity, but there is also widespread agreement that it is a dimension of all human activity and something of which we are all capable in our daily lives. It is, in a sense, a 'making' process, even if its products are ideas or feelings rather than artefacts.

Creativity is not limited to the arts or the sciences, but is an essential part of all disciplines.

For the physicist David Bohm, 'just as the health of the body demands that we breathe properly, so, whether we like it or not, the health of the mind demands that we be creative.' The arts educator Leslie Perry stresses the importance of preserving past creativity and bringing it into a continuity with the present by knowledge well learnt.

'It is the ability to see more in the immediate that is, I believe, our deepest source of pleasure in the world. And this is one of the reasons why we need to educate children to be imaginative. For the aim of education is pleasure.

Freedom and organisation go hand in hand; they are together the power which the imagination bestows. Armed with these, [the child] will experience the pleasures of his own competence.'

Mary Warnock, philosopher, 1983

Museums and galleries as creative spaces

Creativity depends upon the capabilities of the individual, including attitudes, knowledge, skills, confidence and judgement; the support of others including family and educators; and the provision of an environment which is conducive to creativity.

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, when researching the kind of spaces preferred by successful innovators, found that there is no evidence that beautiful settings in themselves stimulate creativity, although novel and complex settings seem to do so. More important are richness of resources, interaction with other creative individuals, the stimulation of very diverse ideas, activities and disciplines, and the freedom to experiment.

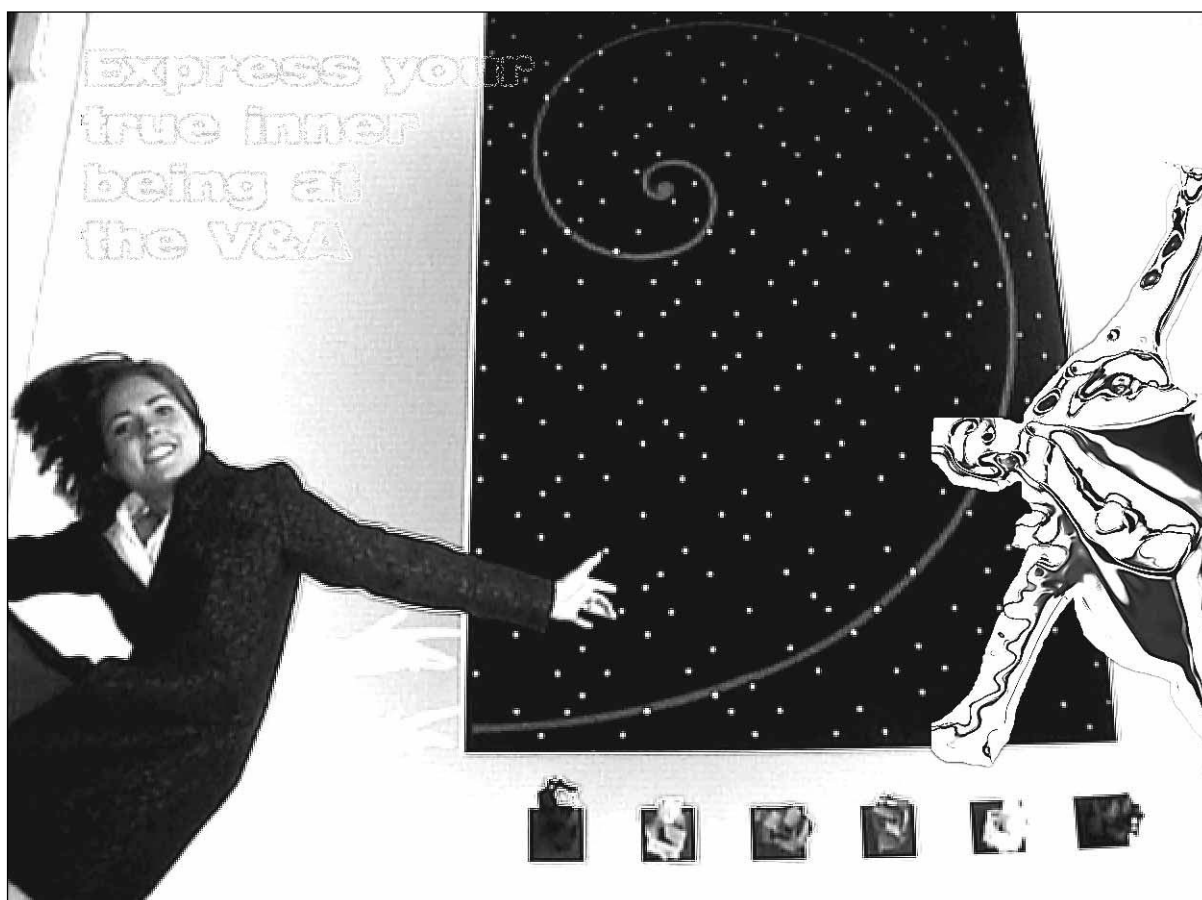
Museums and galleries have exceptional potential to become active, creative, public spaces of this kind. By presenting the products of the past, they give symbolic value to creativity. They act as catalysts for on-site creativity by professionals and the public, and encourage interchange between them. As a meeting place of concepts and disciplines, museums and galleries are an essential element in the wider creative process in society. As educational institutions, they are seedbeds of future creativity for both children and adults.

NESTA, the Lottery-funded National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, owes its genesis to the recognition that creativity, like learning, will be an important

determinant of future national success. NESTA will work with other bodies to help talented individuals to achieve their full potential, turn creativity and ideas into products and services, and advance public awareness of appreciation of the contribution of the creative industries.

The development of creative industries and communities within a learning society will require a population with enhanced visual and other literacies. Development of digital applications which foster creative public participation will require new skills across a wide range of disciplines.

Museums and galleries have, therefore, two kinds of training responsibility. The first is to train and support the public to enable both to make creative use of cultural resources in their communities. The second is to train staff in the skills of enabling public participation and learning. Neither of these forms of training has traditionally had high priority in the museum sector, but they are essential if museums and galleries are to play an active part in the work of NESTA and other Government initiatives in the cultural sector.



'The V & A, A Place for People'. Poster created by visitors using digital technologies during the educational event 'Going Graphic' at the Victoria & Albert Museum. (Photo: V & A Museum)

Responding to the Challenge

By defining their educational role, museums identify the most important part of their contract with society, and establish the standards against which they can be judged as public educational institutions.

A unique kind of learning

Museums have a responsibility to enable visitors to learn in ways that are different from and complementary to those offered by other educational providers such as schools and colleges. The unique characteristic of museum learning is that it is based on first-hand, concrete experience of real objects, specimens, works of art and other authentic resources in a social environment in galleries or at sites. Museum learning is more concentrated and deliberately structured than everyday life, and more diverse, informal and culturally rich than formal education.

Most everyday events are inconsequential and quickly forgotten. A remarkable characteristic of museums is that so many people, of all ages and walks of life, have had exceptional and life-enhancing experiences, through encounters with beautiful, old, rare, spectacular, ingenious, well-realised or evocative objects in museum settings, which they can remember vividly many years later. It is one of the purposes of museums to achieve this.

Museum experiences, however powerful, do not happen in isolation. They are part of, and give impetus to, a wider personal learning process. As individuals, we all learn something different even from a shared experience, and attribute our own meanings to it. The learning of each of us, says the adult educator Peter Jarvis, is 'like a patchwork quilt with each little element altering at a different rate to every other'. Museums are most effective when they help the public to build upon their museum learning experiences by relating them to ongoing learning processes at home or at educational institutions, training centres, libraries and community centres.

‘I can remember attending drawing sessions during my days as a student at the Royal College of Art and really got hooked at that time. I also remember one term when I left my research into cutlery so late that there was only one afternoon left to do the whole thesis and all the drawings! That afternoon was such a revelation, that I can still feel the incredulity that was my reaction when I first looked at such pieces’.

Gerald Benney, goldsmith and silversmith, 1986

Cultural literacy for individuals

Cultural literacy is the capacity to understand, respect and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds; it develops in us a sense of our own identity. This capacity is essential for participation as citizens in pluralistic societies, such as those of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Cultural literacy is also essential for our personal development.

Museums are the richest source we have of original objects and works of art from other times and societies. They are places for contact and exchange between living cultures. Museums have a responsibility to educate the public about their own cultures, but also a responsibility to encourage the development of the attitudes and values which foster cultural literacy.

‘Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a group’.

Edward Tylor, anthropologist, 1871

‘Culture is a classification of the world that allows us to get our bearings more easily; it is the memory of the past that belongs to a community, which implies a code of behaviour in the present, and also a set of strategies for the future’.

Izvetan Todorov, cultural theorist, 1993

Cultural development of communities

The need for museums to take an active role in promoting the cultural development of their area, through participation in creative, social, environmental and economic initiatives, has never been greater than it is today.

'We do not believe that things are going to change overnight, but it is just possible that what we are doing may have one small impact on the troubled society in which we live'.

Teacher on a residential course for children from different religious backgrounds at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, 1992

As repositories for local resources, many museums can help to ensure that decisions and contemporary developments affecting the future of their communities are informed by an awareness of what is distinctive and valuable from the past and in the present. As museums in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom have already proved, museums can also work as agents of change in their communities, helping conflicting groups to define belonging and identity more inclusively. With skill and imagination, museums can use the energy which is latent in objects and works of art as a catalyst for the creativity of architects, planners, community groups, leisure organisations, local societies and businesses. To everything that is concerned with the quality of life of a community, museums can make a valuable contribution.

'Keeping and understanding the past makes for tolerance; it also makes for creativity in devising ways of altering and adding to towns, for nothing comes out of a vacuum. It is hard to believe that those who made the running in English towns in the 1950s and 1960s would have done what they did had they known more about them'.

Mark Girouard, architectural historian, 1990

Museums as public space

Every local community needs public space that is welcoming and secure, and encourages participation. Museums can provide such a space. Their values, codes of morality and expectations of behaviour help to shape those of the public. Their willingness to embrace diversity, and to remove barriers to access of whatever kind, establishes norms of inclusion which can influence private behaviour. Museums can also have an important role in defining public notions of quality, including aesthetic quality, in their communities, and can serve as places of debate, informed discussion, and expression of public feeling. For those members of the public whose private domain may be impoverished and insecure, the existence of a clean,

comfortable and beautiful place which is theirs to enter and share with others as of right, brings particular benefits. Museums are metaphors for the kind of society we have, and the society we wish to create.

The relationship which museums establish between professional staff and the public sets the terms for their educational work. Museums that adopt the traditional Scottish concept, as defined by the philosopher George Davie, of ‘common-sense’ – the notion that the expertise of the professional is accountable to and works in partnership with the educated understanding and generalist judgement of the whole community – open themselves to educational approaches that are far more fruitful and democratic than those defined solely in terms of professional knowledge.

Ethical leadership

All organisations need standards of ethics if they are to conduct their operations fairly and effectively. The authority invested in museums places upon them an additional responsibility to provide ethical leadership and to show by example the importance of ethics in public service. Members of the public – and particularly children – often learn and remember more from how they were treated by the museum than from the formal content of the displays. Education is about how things are done as well as what is done.

Museums can demonstrate ethical leadership in their educational work by representing ideas, personalities, events and societies with sensitivity and respect; taking active steps to redress bias in collections or interpretations which might otherwise influence or mislead the public; raising ethical or moral issues in displays, publications or programmes; and ensuring that the commercial objectives of the institution and the interests and enthusiasms of individual members of staff enhance rather than conflict with the institution’s educational purpose. Museums can also ensure that the principles of equal opportunities guide all educational activities for the public. Both the Museums Association (MA) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) have developed codes of ethics for museum staff which address many of these issues.

Disseminating the skills of museum learning

Most of us are never taught to live and learn through all our senses, using the full spectrum of our intelligence. Particular emphasis is placed in formal education upon logical and verbal reasoning. The best museum education complements rather than imitates the formal education sector; museums are places for the (non-rational, intuitive) right brain as well as the (logical, analytical) left. They have a responsibility to help people to acquire skills which are distinctive to museums and heritage sites, skills of perception, feeling and imagination, as well as analysis,

critical evaluation and communication, in response to high quality, original, natural and cultural resources. Most people also need help in learning how to think scientifically, historically and aesthetically when using such material. We need these skills to get the most from a museum visit, and we need them in everyday life.

‘The Museum and the things it enshrines are saying, “Come in and observe, see what history has to say, and then go away and become a creative designer”. One goes there to breathe (‘inspirare’ is to breathe), to be inspired by the great ‘animateur’, to see what the finest standards were assumed to be in the past, and to emulate them - not to copy the objects to all - in one’s own sphere of action’.

David Peace, glass engraver, 1986

It is far more important that museums should enable the public to develop these skills, than that they should simply give them information about their collections. We are born with a capacity for these kinds of learning, but they will only develop if museums, as the experts in this field, actively help us as children and adults to acquire them.

Museums have long traditions of scholarship in the study of their collections. These traditions are comparable with those of universities, but different in important respects. Museums foster a different way of knowing, and serve a broader public. They have a responsibility to encourage excellence, not just in the study of their collections, but in the study of public learning in museums. And they must disseminate these skills of museum learning as widely as possible through society.

‘There is no question that the life of every member of society would be impoverished if the skills for encoding human experience in works of beauty, and the skills for decoding it, were lost. We would then be sentenced to live within the limits of our actual existences’.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, research psychologist, 1990

Investing in the future

Museums, as permanent institutions, have a particular responsibility to invest in the future. Museums themselves can no longer take that future for granted. Their survival as a sector, and their effectiveness as educational institutions, depends as crucially upon their investment in their public as museum users as it does upon the preservation and development of their collections.

Of particular importance to museums is a commitment to the participation of children from all backgrounds in their activities. Children's attitudes and patterns of behaviour are not fixed, but develop rapidly. Research by the educational psychologist Howard Gardner indicates that the fundamental skills of a lifetime's engagement in the arts – as creator, performer, audience member, and critic – are often established in early childhood. To wait until children are old enough to appreciate and use museums as independent adults, or to confine these opportunities to those who already have the skills to use museums, would be in many cases to do too little too late. Once missed, the chance to develop these capabilities may be lost forever. Future support for museums largely depends upon their success in building positive relationships with children of this generation, in the context of full provision for lifelong learning.

'In order to talk about the spiritual significance of works of art like Benin bronzes, I think it is important to appreciate three things. First of all, they are not entirely art for art's sake. Secondly, they had ritual significance and thirdly, they came from the land's dreaming. They were a collective manifestation through the artist of the way in which people of that land think and dream and remember and project. A single work of art contains in it a micro and a macro history of the consciousness of a whole people. It's a sculptural library in a couple of forms.

When that's lost, removed from the land, the works of art are in permanent exile, which is to say, one half of them dies. The second thing that happens is that the people themselves are in a sort of exile. They are in exile from the repository of their dreams. They are in exile from the highest significance that years of ritual evolution and social evolution and artistic evolution have given rise to. One of the most effective and tragic ways of destroying a people's spirit is to, as it were, destroy the validity of their works of art. When that validity is destroyed, you have a kind of cultural schizophrenia. You have a sense in which people no longer know what they are, what they were and, therefore, what they can become'.

Ben Okri, writer, 1995

Museum Education Today: Key Findings

Research conducted for this report identified the existence of 755 specialised education posts in 375 museums services in United Kingdom museums in March 1996 – about double the number that were estimated in the early 1980s. Whether the nature of museum education provision has also changed, from being a separate, add-on activity to becoming a core function integral to all museum activities, is difficult to assess. No national statistical data on educational policy and provision exists from earlier decades. Nor are there any national standards against which provision can be measured. Thus, in many crucial respects, the educational function of museums remains uncharted territory.

The first questionnaire survey

The questionnaire surveys which were undertaken for this report are the most comprehensive yet on museum education. The sample of 566 institutions that responded to the first questionnaire was representative of museums in the United Kingdom both in type of museum and type of collections, but included more large institutions and fewer small ones than in the sector as a whole.

While most questions elicited a high response rate, some were regarded by many respondents as difficult or irrelevant to their institution. These questions had lower response rates. In order to represent these responses as consistently as possible, results are shown throughout this report as percentages of the full sample, except where stated otherwise.

Levels of provision

The most startling result of the first questionnaire is that only one-third (210 institutions, or 37%) of museums that responded made some limited provision for education (defined here as offering three or more activities from the long list of options in Figure 1) and just 51% offered any educational services whatsoever. Only 23% had an education policy. It should be noted that education usually provides the justification for museums gaining charitable status. Museums in the sample which indicated that they make no provision for education almost certainly include some institutions which have charitable status on these grounds.

In 1997 the Museums & Galleries Commission used its database of museums to conduct a survey of public services, which included a question on educational provision based partly on the categories in Figure 1. This indicated that a higher proportion of museums now made provision for education than in 1994, but the sample was limited to Registered museums, which may be more likely than non-Registered museums to provide education services.

Figure 1: *Current educational provision, and the importance of different educational activities in future, by percentage*

Educational Activity	No Response	Current Provision		Future Provision		
		Provided	Not Provided	Essential	Desirable	Not Important
Reception and lunch facilities for schools and/or other educational groups	20	30	50	19	42	19
Direct teaching services for schools	21	28	51	18	41	20
In-service training programmes for teachers	22	27	51	23	38	17
Provision of printed/ audio-visual information and guidance for schools	17	45	38	31	46	6
Provision of activities and/or materials for pre-school children	22	18	60	11	44	23
Services for children (5-12)	17	50	33	41	36	6
Services for teenagers (13-18)	18	39	43	33	44	5
Events for families	20	32	48	21	42	16
Trails and other resources for families	21	26	53	13	46	20
Direct teaching services or courses for FE and HE students	26	20	55	10	41	24
Publications and other resources for FE and HE students	26	18	57	10	46	19
Work experience opportunities for school pupils, college students or museum studies students	19	45	36	13	54	14
Lectures and courses for adults	19	46	35	22	49	10
Publications and other resources for adults	20	43	37	24	49	7
Events/teaching services for special needs groups	22	26	52	18	48	12
Publications and resources for special needs groups	26	9	65	9	49	16
Events/teaching services for minority communities	27	7	66	9	35	29
Publications and resources for minority communities	29	5	65	6	33	32
Organised research facilities for students, teachers/tutors and academics	21	31	48	24	43	13
Academic conferences, study days and other events	24	22	54	11	40	25
Academic publications and other resources	24	22	54	12	43	22
Loan Services	23	29	49	14	39	25
Exhibitions/events with structured educational input at planning stage	21	33	46	33	37	9

Museums offered widely differing levels of service to different audiences. The most common forms of provision were information for schools, services for children aged 5-12 years, and lectures and publications for adults. Services for pre-school children, students in further and higher education and academic specialists were in the second order of priority. Minority communities, groups with disabilities or special educational needs and unemployed people received little separate provision, and were the lowest priority. Only 15% of museums had a disability policy and 7% a multi-cultural policy. It should also be noted that provision of some services to a particular category of user (such as direct teaching for schools) may, in practice, be available to only a small percentage of museum users in that category.

The importance of education in service delivery

Respondents to the first questionnaire (who were predominantly senior managers) were asked to rank museum functions in order of priority. Most of them placed education in the second rank, after collections management and exhibition and display. However, it is notable that most museums identified educational objectives as the most significant factor in exhibition and display, and of some significance in all other museum functions. Two-thirds (64%) said that their governing body believed education to be an essential part of service delivery, compared with 28% who regarded it as advantageous but not essential, and 2% as of little or no value. One-third (35%) of museums believed that core educational activities and services should be funded directly by the institution if no generated income or sponsorship was available, others saying they should be provided through self-funding alone (11%), or through a mixture of self-funding and institutional funding (37%).

Altruistic, long-term objectives, such as 'providing a public service' and 'benefiting society' predominated as reasons for making educational provision over instrumental objectives such as 'building public support', 'increasing visitor numbers', 'income generation' and 'local economic regeneration'. Museums which provided no direct education services cited 'lack of funds' as the main reason, followed by 'lack of in-house skills'. Other reasons, such as 'low demand', 'low priority' and 'provided by others', were less significant.

Staff

A majority of museums taking part in the survey had no member of staff with specific responsibility for education. On average, 3% of all the paid and voluntary staff in museums in the sample were education specialists. They were easily outnumbered by the curators and others (11% of all museum staff) who contributed to the organisation and delivery of museum

education programmes as non-specialists. In 1993–94, one-third of museums (37%) received help from education authority advisors; one in six (15%) used consultants, and the same percentage used freelance museum educators.

Museums generally placed limited value on staff development or training programmes; only 25% provided these for their staff, and only 13% had programmes with an educational element. Nor did museums place a high value on qualifications or experience when recruiting specialist education staff; only 25% thought a university degree essential, and only 15% and 4% would require a postgraduate qualification in education and a museum studies qualification respectively. In more than 40% of those museums which employed education specialists, these individuals did not earn a salary equal to that of curators with equivalent responsibilities, and in about 30% of these institutions, they did not have equivalent conditions of service.

Expenditure on education

Forty-five institutions – predominantly national and local authority museums – provided details of their actual net revenue budgets in the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94. Their budgets showed an average fall of 5% in spending on education as a percentage of overall museum budgets, from 4.8% to 4.6%, over this period. The financial pressures of recent years appear, then, to have affected education funding more than other museum functions.

Galleries and facilities

The survey showed that only a minority of museums (33%) had a structured education input at the planning stage of exhibitions or public events. It also showed that facilities for education were limited: only 36% had a general teaching room of any kind for public use, and less than 10% had a practical art or photography studio, or a children's gallery. Fewer than half of museums conducted any evaluation of their galleries, teaching programmes, publications or other education provision.

Differences between types of museums

Not surprisingly, there were significant differences in policy and provision between types of museums in the survey. National museums were the most likely to see education as an essential part of service delivery, but were also likely to give it a low priority as a function. Local authority museums had a larger percentage of education specialists (4.5% average) on their staff than other museums, and were most likely to regard direct teaching services for schools, loan services and services for minority communities as essential; they were also more likely to have special facilities for education than most other types of museum. Independent museums,

the largest group represented in the sample, tended to the average in most areas of provision; they were, however, more likely to give priority to adults and families than other museums and were less likely to evaluate their educational provision. National museums and university museums were most likely to require degrees as a qualification for staff; these and local authority museums were most likely to say that core educational activities should be funded directly by the institution. University museums were, however, conspicuous in giving 'low priority' rather than 'lack of funds' as the main reason for not providing education services.

Armed services museums were in an undistinguished category of their own in their neglect of their educational responsibilities. They were least likely to provide any education services and least likely to evaluate those they do provide. They had the lowest expectations of qualifications for any education staff they employ, and were most likely to give them unequal employment status compared with curatorial staff. Only 3% of armed services museums include an education element in staff training and development.

The second questionnaire survey

The second survey sought more detailed information from the 210 institutions whose responses to the first survey showed that they provided three or more types of educational service or activity. The 88 museums which responded did not include any university or armed services museums.

Services in the community

The questionnaire provided, for the first time, a profile of educational provision by museums in their communities. The survey showed that most museums which provided on-site services also provided services in their communities, and that the majority of off-site services consisted of services to schools. Some museums provided services to elderly groups, but very few had developed services for minority communities or other groups that are under-represented among museum visitors.

Research and evaluation

Educational research and study of good practice abroad were not common, even among this sample of museums which had made provision for education; only one in ten had published a research project in a recognised academic publication or professional journal since 1990, and only one in four had education staff who had undertaken a professional visit to Europe. Evaluation studies were more common but were still undertaken by fewer than half of museums with education services.

The second questionnaire also elicited professional employment histories from 163 museum education specialists. Only 28% had previous museum education experience, less than the 31% who had previously worked as curators or in another non-education function in museums. Nearly two-thirds (61%) had five years experience or less as museum educators.

Museum education in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England

There are important differences in provision for museum education in the four countries of the United Kingdom, attributable in part to their separate educational, administrative and legal systems, as well as to cultural and other factors. Colloquia were held in Belfast, Aberystwyth and Edinburgh to identify these distinctive features in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. The eight colloquia held in England helped to define the characteristics of provision in that country.

Museum education in Northern Ireland

The small size of Northern Ireland promotes networking. Museum educators regularly work in close partnership with a wide range of other providers including the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment (NICCEA), the Education and Library Boards, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the National Trust, colleges, universities and the broadcasting media. A notable feature of the educational work of museums in Northern Ireland has been the development of programmes and resources to support cross-community understanding and reconciliation. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland has played a crucial role in this, providing the policy framework, the resources and the encouragement which have translated the commitment of professionals from different sectors and the resources of museums into real projects in communities. The result has been a concerted initiative through museums of cultural development which warrants more detailed evaluation. In 1998 ENGAGE (the National Association for Gallery Education) was funded to extend Gallery Week into Northern Ireland, and recruited its first area representative for the province.

Museum education in Wales

Wales has a strong tradition, enriched by its cultural diversity and particularly the Welsh language, of commitment to education. Despite this, provision for museum education in Wales, beyond the National Museums and Galleries of Wales (NMGW), Welsh Historic Monuments (Cadw) and a few local authority museums, is patchy. This problem is exacerbated by the physical isolation of many museums. At one time the NMGW's national loan service provided

one solution to this problem, but its future is now uncertain. Some museums have responded to these challenges by identifying the pooling of resources as the key to educational development. In recent years, the emerging dialogue between the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACAC), the educational media and arts organisations in Wales has also been a particularly positive step. Wales was chosen by ENGAGE to pilot a new project, Opt for Art, linking schools and galleries to benefit over 5000 pupils annually. The Group for Education in Museums (GEM) has also made efforts to encourage links and has an active training and networking programme for museum educators.

Museum education in Scotland

Museums in Scotland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, have an important role as repositories of local cultural identity. In addition, the country's long tradition of adult education provides fertile ground for community initiatives by museums. Uniquely in the United Kingdom, local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to ensure that there is adequate provision for cultural activities, including museums, for the inhabitants of their areas. GEM also provides both training and support for museum education in Scotland. The reality, however, is that – as in some other parts of the United Kingdom – many areas in Scotland have few museums and fewer specialist education staff.

The development of the Scottish Cultural Resource Access Network (SCRAN), a computerised information resource based in museum collections throughout Scotland, provides a positive example of collaboration. Yet, although there are links and points of contact on specific aspects of the curriculum, as a sector, museums in Scotland have not yet established partnerships with curriculum authorities and the education media comparable with those now emerging in Northern Ireland and Wales. It is notable in this context that museums in Scotland which responded to the first questionnaire were less likely to make educational provision a priority than museums in any other part of the United Kingdom.

Significant advances have resulted in the appointment of an Education and Interpretation Adviser by the Scottish Museums Council (SMC) in June 1997 with funding from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, an initiative that was a direct response to the first edition of *A Common Wealth*. The Adviser's remit is to advance museum education and, to achieve this, priority is being given to forming meaningful partnerships with the curriculum authorities and educational media.

In March 1998 the SMC commissioned a Survey of Current Practice in Museum Education in

Scotland which revealed that three-quarters of SMC members are providing an educational service. Numbers of specialist staff remain low but SMC is addressing the need to improve this through its grant-aid programme and two new posts were created in 1998. In future, funding will be directed to create posts covering more than one museum, for example across local authority areas, to encourage joint working to improve standards.

Museum education in England

The greater size and number of museums in England in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom has meant that museum education in England has a strong regional identity. Both GEM and ENGAGE have regional coordinators and regional programmes. The seven Area Museum Councils (AMCs) in England also have different policies towards museum education, each reflecting the distinctive needs of their members. At its best this fragmentation has encouraged local initiative; at its worst it has inhibited a coordinated response in England to national developments. As in other parts of the United Kingdom, then, provision for museum education in England varies greatly in scale and quality in different areas, depending upon local circumstances.

A unique feature of museum education in England is the strength of the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester as an international leader in research, teaching and publishing on museum education. Another positive feature is the active interest of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in building links with the museum sector. This has resulted in a series of publications on the use of museums by schools which have greatly benefited both the schools and museums sectors.

A patchwork of provision

Within many individual institutions, provision for museum education is characterised by the absence of any underlying rationale. For no apparent reason, two museums with similar types of collections and potential audiences may offer significantly different education services – or none at all. Too often, these decisions depend upon arbitrary factors, such as the nature of a museum's governing body, or even the personal preferences of individual staff.

The reasons for this incoherence are fundamentally structural and historical. Museums, unlike libraries, lie outside the statutory framework of local authority responsibilities and until recently received only limited encouragement, funding or research support to develop their educational role. The United Kingdom also has a large (and often educationally innovative) independent museum sector.

The low level of educational provision in museums revealed by the surveys for this report is a waste of a valuable public learning resource and should be a matter of deep concern for museums, their governing bodies and policy makers. In many other sectors it would be unthinkable for a vital function to be so neglected. The need to bring educational provision up to a consistent professional standard in all United Kingdom museums presents the sector with a critical challenge which should now be addressed as a matter of urgency.



Printed felt blanket, 1995. Made with artist Rochelle Rubenstein during her residency on the Artist's Work programme, for the exhibition 'Once is Too Much' at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

'Once is Too Much' was a collaborative project created by women from the Family Resources Centre, St Michael's Estate, Inchicore, Dublin with artists exploring the issues of violence against women.

(Photo: Denis Mortell)

Survey of museum and gallery education posts in the United Kingdom

Data for this survey was compiled using the Museums Association Yearbook, and information from the Area Museum Councils and the Group for Education in Museums. It is intended to be correct as at March 1996, before local government reorganisation took place in many areas; the survey identified 755 established education posts, 535 full-time and 220 part-time, in existence at that time.

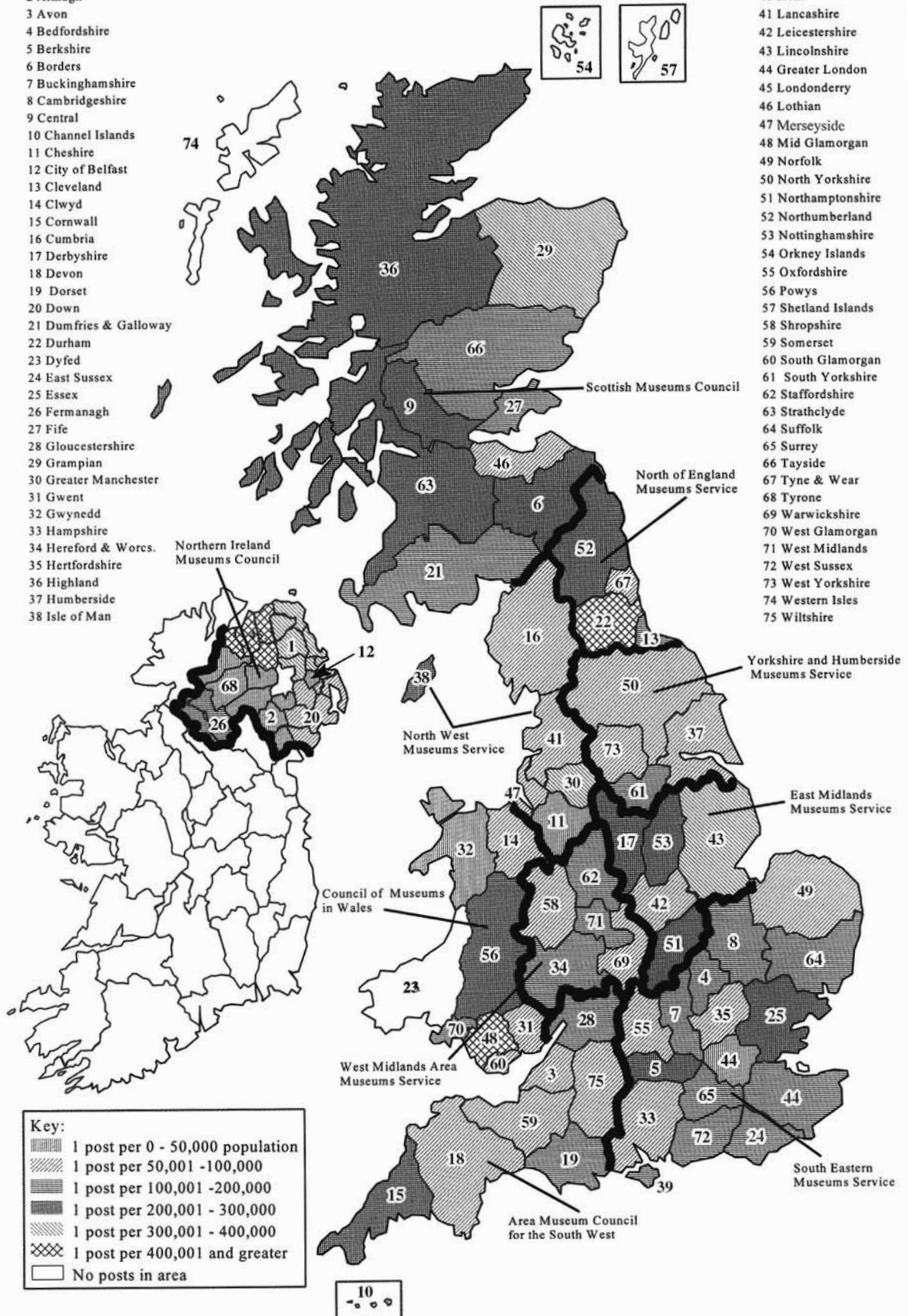
Population figures for the English counties and metropolitan districts, Northern Ireland counties, Scottish regions and Welsh counties, were obtained from the Municipal Yearbook 1995/96. The number of posts was correlated with these population figures to show the ratio of museum education posts to the population size.

It should be remembered that in some areas, there are few museums or comparable institutions and hence few museum education posts. There are also many different ways to provide education services, as a number of the case studies in the report show. For example, although there were no museum education staff in Dyfed, the education authority had taken an active part in co-ordinating museum services to schools. In Nottinghamshire, museums had developed a pool of freelance educators to deliver services. It should also be noted that large rural areas with small populations may seem to be reasonably well provided for, when in reality distances may make access to provision very difficult.

Survey of Museum and Gallery Education Posts

- 1 Antrim
- 2 Armagh
- 3 Avon
- 4 Bedfordshire
- 5 Berkshire
- 6 Borders
- 7 Buckinghamshire
- 8 Cambridgeshire
- 9 Central
- 10 Channel Islands
- 11 Cheshire
- 12 City of Belfast
- 13 Cleveland
- 14 Clwyd
- 15 Cornwall
- 16 Cumbria
- 17 Derbyshire
- 18 Devon
- 19 Dorset
- 20 Down
- 21 Dumfries & Galloway
- 22 Durham
- 23 Dyfed
- 24 East Sussex
- 25 Essex
- 26 Fermanagh
- 27 Fife
- 28 Gloucestershire
- 29 Grampian
- 30 Greater Manchester
- 31 Gwent
- 32 Gwynedd
- 33 Hampshire
- 34 Hereford & Worcs.
- 35 Hertfordshire
- 36 Highland
- 37 Humberside
- 38 Isle of Man

- 39 Isle of Wight
- 40 Kent
- 41 Lancashire
- 42 Leicestershire
- 43 Lincolnshire
- 44 Greater London
- 45 Londonderry
- 46 Lothian
- 47 Merseyside
- 48 Mid Glamorgan
- 49 Norfolk
- 50 North Yorkshire
- 51 Northamptonshire
- 52 Northumberland
- 53 Nottinghamshire
- 54 Orkney Islands
- 55 Oxfordshire
- 56 Powys
- 57 Shetland Islands
- 58 Shropshire
- 59 Somerset
- 60 South Glamorgan
- 61 South Yorkshire
- 62 Staffordshire
- 63 Strathclyde
- 64 Suffolk
- 65 Surrey
- 66 Tayside
- 67 Tynes & Wear
- 68 Tyrone
- 69 Warwickshire
- 70 West Glamorgan
- 71 West Midlands
- 72 West Sussex
- 73 West Yorkshire
- 74 Western Isles
- 75 Wiltshire



Key:

- 1 post per 0 - 50,000 population
- 1 post per 50,001 - 100,000
- 1 post per 100,001 - 200,000
- 1 post per 200,001 - 300,000
- 1 post per 300,001 - 400,000
- 1 post per 400,001 and greater
- No posts in area

10

The Museum's Educational Mission

Target 1: To develop museums as learning organisations, with education central to their purpose

Museums should make education an integral part of their forward plans and publish strategies for their implementation. As such, strategic development of museum education must be the responsibility of the director and the governing body of every museum. This cannot be delegated to individual members of staff.

‘Our mission statement commits us to work particularly with those individuals and groups who wish to increase their educational abilities and activities or to become more effective in their local, national or international organisations for the betterment of the societies in which they live’.

Ruskin College, Oxford, 1992

The museums that responded to the first questionnaire survey were asked to provide a copy of their mission statements. Only 26% of the statements received included the word ‘education’ or something similar. Many museum missions describe what their staff do to objects – acquire, conserve, research, display and interpret. Words that describe how visitors can actively participate in and learn through museums – such as ‘enjoy’ or ‘create’ – are less common.

Most private companies define their mission in terms of the benefit for their shareholders and stakeholders. The equivalent for museums is the benefit for their communities and the society of which they are part. It is the purpose of the museum’s mission to illuminate and direct decisions on priorities, and to provide a rationale for them. Articulating the museum’s educational role in its mission statement enables the institution to have the greatest educational impact and influence.

The Museums Association (MA) recently assisted this process by replacing its former, collections-focused definition of a museum with one which reflects the more inclusive and participatory concept of a museum that the Association is now encouraging its members to adopt. It states that, “A museum enables people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. It is an institution that collects, safeguards and makes accessible artefacts and specimens, which it holds in trust for society”.

In 1996, the Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) developed guidelines on museum education for museum managers. These recognise education as a core function of museums, and recommend that all museums should have a written policy on education that is endorsed by the governing body and supported by an action plan based on research into the learning needs of their communities. The guidelines also recommend that staff should receive training, advice and support to enable them to fulfil their educational responsibilities, and that a senior member of staff should be given responsibility for educational development.

Despite being rich in the cultural and intellectual resources of their staff, collections and communities, many museums are now struggling to survive. By making a strong commitment to both individual and corporate learning, museums can capitalise on their resources. The challenge faced by museums today is comparable to that which the industrial sector has faced in recent decades. But museums have the advantage that learning is the end as well as the means of their business.

Museums cannot become centres of learning unless they themselves also become learning organisations. For many museums this requires a change of organisational culture. Museum directors can lead this process in three ways: by publicly demonstrating their own commitment to education; by establishing structures for consultation and decision-making which open their institutions to debate and constructive criticism; and by encouraging and rewarding imagination, creativity, risk-taking and reflection.

The Museum as a Learning Resource

Target 2: To utilise the whole public dimension of museums for learning

Three main types of provision for learning define a museum: exhibits, programmes, and services for self-directed learning. All three are integral and inter-dependent parts of the educational function of every museum. Deficiencies in any one will significantly diminish the value and effectiveness of the others.

Exhibits

Galleries are a museum's principal instruments of education. They are a medium of exceptional power and versatility. Some are calm, restrained and designed to encourage contemplation; others are theatrical spaces in which visitors can vicariously relive events from the past. The strength of galleries as places of learning lies in their ability to change attitudes, evoke feelings, demonstrate processes, convey significant ideas directly and simply, and engage visitors personally and actively in ways that ensure that the experience is remembered long afterwards. Galleries are not effective at communicating detailed information or complex concepts.

Universities believe it is an essential part of their educational mission to represent the pluralism of society and the rigour of intellectual debate. In the past, museums have usually achieved neutrality in their galleries by excluding controversy. This is now changing. Some museums allow other voices besides those of their staff to be heard - local people, specialists from other walks of life, children, members of minority groups as well as documented individuals from the past. Other museums have acknowledged that there are ways of knowing other than objective logic, and are committed to engaging visitors as partners in the process of enquiry. In doing so, they have transformed the learning potential of galleries and changed irrevocably the relationship between the public and the institutions.

One of the most exciting developments of the last decade has been the willingness of innovative museums to experiment with alternative approaches to gallery design. Museums have long been aware of the importance of enhancing the quality of visual expression. Through the use of conversation, poetry, personal testimony and oral tradition, some museums are now extending the aural dimension of their spaces. Artists, craftspeople, writers and others who have expertise as practitioners, can also enrich the design of galleries and

should now be regarded as an essential element in any good gallery programme. The presence in the galleries of some museums of staff who are trained to enhance visitor learning also enhances greatly public enjoyment, social engagement and interest in the displays.

Adults as much as children need a gallery environment that allows open and exploratory learning and encourages them to question and challenge. The use of open-access practical activities and participatory exhibits in galleries is, at last, spreading from industrial museums and science institutions into art and history museums. Museums are also discovering that well designed, low technology can be just as effective in educational terms as high technology.

Museums committed to providing attractive, stimulating and educationally rich galleries, have begun to devote significant resources to the process of gallery development. Research into visitor learning and evaluation of exhibits have become essential elements in these institutions. The people concerned, who in these institutions usually include a museum learning specialist, work as a team and regard the task as a shared learning process which will inform subsequent projects.

Best practice as described here has been adopted by only a minority of museums. Most museums do not conduct research and evaluation of visitor learning. The second questionnaire revealed that even in those museums that employ education specialists, only 22% invited those staff to contribute actively to the gallery design process. The omission of education specialists from development of a museum's most important educational resource is a cause for serious concern. It undoubtedly limits the effectiveness of both the museums and the individual museum educators.

CASE STUDY: AN EXPERIMENTAL GALLERY:

The National Portrait Gallery

At the National Portrait Gallery exhibitions have been an established part of the education department's work since 1983. The Studio Gallery is available half of the time for exhibitions planned by education staff and this enables the department to experiment with different approaches.

'Put Yourself in the Picture' was an exhibition from July to October 1995, designed for family groups. Using five seventeenth-century portraits, it looked at the elements of portraiture - pose, expression, background, costume, accessories and composition. The organisation of the exhibition was an attempt to achieve the same kind of learning

situation as in a gallery teaching session where open questions seek opinions and feelings as well as developing cognitive responses. This approach involves more of visitors' senses and takes account of research that suggests that some visitors like to 'do' and some to watch others 'doing'.

The exhibition was different from the usual kind of traditional 'curatorial' exhibition in a number of ways. It focused primarily on the audience rather than on the subject matter. It was based on a model of learning: play activity, leading to more structured activity, which in turn led to looking at the picture. The main aim was to create empathy with the portraits and to link this explicitly with looking at portraits elsewhere in the gallery. Text was in the form of questions, with suggested activities using props, backgrounds, masks and mirrors, leading visitors to see more in the paintings. Proximity of the painting to the interactive exhibit and text was a very important part of the design.

Programmes

Education programmes represent the museum at its most proactive in its relationship with the public. Education programmes are the most flexible and effective way to extend access.

Museums invest in them because they make a difference. They are instruments of change.

The programmes offered by the larger regional and national museums today for both the formal education sector and wider public are extraordinary in their diversity. They range from accredited MA degree courses run jointly with universities to drop-in gallery activities that may last for only a few minutes. Increasingly, museums are using drama and other performance arts to enliven their galleries, producing publications in various media to help groups to prepare and extend museum visits, or training teachers and parents to guide and develop children's learning. As in the design of galleries, museums can enrich their programmes by drawing on outside experts with a wide range of skills, from sculptors to scientists, to help the public to respond creatively to exhibits and collections and to bring their subject disciplines to life. Some institutions have also established open and distance-learning programmes; others have trained volunteers or freelancers to work on their behalf in their communities.

CASE STUDY: CROSS-COMMUNITY WORK:**The educational residential centre at Ulster Folk and Transport Museum,
National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland**

From its establishment the museum, representing a common heritage of material culture and oral tradition, was seen as a neutral venue for cross-community work.

The opportunity to extend this work was created when the Northern Ireland Government decided to allocate resources for cross-community projects in the late 1980s. The Common Curriculum in Northern Ireland also designated Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage as cross-curricular themes.

Residential accommodation for two classes was built in reconstructed 19th century terraced houses in the heart of the 160 acre estate. The majority of schools now visit in cross-community groups. It is a chance for city children to learn about life in rural Ulster in the past, and also to learn about one another.

Programmes, usually a combination of practical crafts, farming, playing traditional games and studying transport, are planned by the EMU Officer (a post funded by the Department of Education, Northern Ireland). Teachers are expected to help to ensure that genuine interaction takes place between the children of the two schools. In the evenings there are cultural activities such as storytelling and traditional music, singing and dancing.

Evaluation shows that the experience is enjoyable; the question of longer-term effects is more difficult to answer. Teachers feel that getting away from sectarian labels, learning to accept other children as friends and sharing traditions has an impact, which is a step, however small, towards better understanding.

In a few museums, the boundary between the gallery and education programmes is blurring, as spaces within galleries are dedicated to activities and performances. Programmes can also make creative connections between collections that are different to those in the existing displays.

The difficulty for museums is that few can provide programmes for more than a fraction of the visitors and others who might use them. Museums must choose options which are developmental, and represent the best interests of the public as a whole as well as those of the institution. These decisions are made more difficult by the fact that there is very little research on the effectiveness of different types of programmes.

Self-directed learning

Through galleries and education programmes, museums operate in their role as educators. In providing support for self-directed learning, museums have a different role, as facilities for autonomous study directed by individuals themselves. This is a vital but neglected part of museum education work, and is likely to grow rapidly over the next decade.

Institutions that make provision for self-directed learning offer the public access to original artefacts, as well as supporting visual and textual sources and spaces in the museum within which to work. The advice and guidance of museum staff who are skilled at assessing the learning capability and needs of a wide range of self-directed learners, and at matching these to museum resources, are also essential if the public are to make effective use of these resources.

Learning Maps

Museums display their collections according to their concepts of knowledge, and the physical layout of their galleries shows how these are connected. If visitors were asked to draw a map of their own knowledge it would look rather different. For an adult with a special interest in clothes, certain shops might be at the centre of this part of their knowledge map, as well as an evening class and possibly related displays in museums. Another, a keen football supporter, will only go to the museum when it has an exhibition on the history of sport in the area. A child with an interest in dinosaurs joins the local junior natural history group and visits the museum out of school hours when working on a science project. Another, a teenager immersed in contemporary youth culture, expects to find little of relevance in any library or museum, and does not visit. For each person these interests are only a small part of much more extensive personal knowledge maps that cross social and working relations, maps that are in a process of constant change through learning.

About 30% of museums have libraries and study collections that are open to the public, but for the most part these are intended for students and academic adults, and many can be used only by appointment. The concept of study facilities which are open to the whole public, including children and general adult visitors, is not widely recognised in museums (unlike libraries). Yet in the formal education sector, a growing emphasis on self-directed learning is sending ever larger numbers of students and school-children to museums, along with parents who are also increasingly involved in their children's research projects. Studying in a museum should be

almost as natural and as easy for students and members of the public as studying in a library. Museums should make every effort to improve their study and research facilities.

A fully integrated service of provision for self-directed learning in cultural institutions, both on-site and on-line, could transform the quality of learning for millions of children, students and adults. Such an integrated network between museums, libraries and other institutions urgently awaits coordination and development at both a local and national level.

Facilities for educational activities

So far as possible, museum education programmes should be provided in galleries or sites, among original works of art, specimens or artefacts. In practice this is not achievable. Few institutions have designed their galleries to accommodate the wide variety of participatory activities needed by visitors. Some activities, such as drama programmes or crafts workshops, which can be extremely effective in educational terms, may put objects at risk or interfere with the enjoyment of other visitors. Some groups need a separate teaching room to prepare for or follow up activities in galleries; others lack confidence and need a secure, private space in which to meet.

Every public museum needs, as a minimum, one if not more separate spaces for educational activities. The lack of teaching and study spaces and facilities for practical activities revealed in the first questionnaire survey would be unthinkable in other educational institutions and is a major obstacle to the development of educational provision for the public. It suggests that many museums are not yet aware of the importance of such spaces in extending public learning in the museum.

The development of the digital museum

There is great potential for even small museums to contribute to local networks and community digital projects which are not commercially viable. At an international level, there is also an exceptional opportunity, for larger museums in particular, possibly in partnership with broadcasters, commercial publishers and open and distance-learning institutions, to disseminate high quality learning material at different educational levels and for different cultural contexts.

The past neglect by many museums and museum agencies of their core educational role leaves many of them in a relatively weak position to meet the challenges and opportunities which now face them as learning comes to the fore. In order to make effective use of digital media for learning, museums need to adopt a 'learning' model rather than an 'information provision'

model in creating digital content. Research suggests that an unmediated database, containing large numbers of digitised images supported by basic textual information, is of educational value to only a small percentage of people. Few have the skills, interest or need to use such data independently (although it is a valuable research resource for those that do).

If museums wish to ensure that their collections and other resources are used imaginatively, they must themselves apply digital technologies actively and productively. Most learners need more developed, accessible, experiential, social and relevant digital learning resources. To provide these, museums need to recruit and develop staff with the necessary learning and other expertise. There is an urgent need for a national training programme for museum staff, comparable to that already provided for public librarians with NOF funding, but embracing content creation as well as dissemination. Staff and public users of museums also need access to networked equipment and software that are capable of supporting creative use of digital museum resources. This, too, requires a national investment.

‘Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?’

T S Eliot, Chorus I from The Rock, 1933

MDA, formerly known as the Museum Documentation Association, has placed an increased emphasis in recent years on the potential use of digital content of museum collections for public educational purposes. Since its relaunch in 1998 MDA has focused the attention of the cultural sector on addressing issues relating to information dissemination. Many museums are now embarking on the development of digital media applications for their records, but are doing so with limited understanding of, or in training in, public learning from digital media. The initiatives of the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation (CHNTO) and the MDA to identify the training needs of museum staff in relation to the new technologies are, therefore, particularly welcome.

The museum sector presently lacks a strategy for digital learning. The decision of the Conference of National Museum Directors to publish a report on digital learning through museums is timely and necessary if the museum sector is to play a leading role in development of the National Grid for Learning. The sector will also need a substantial new investment from public funds if it is to establish the infrastructure of skilled staff, digital learning resources, on-line gallery media centres and other on-site facilities that are needed if the huge educational and commercial potential of media technologies is to be realised.

The museum as a centre for digital learning

Digital media will become ubiquitous. They will transform museum services and change the nature of museums themselves as public institutions with:

- trained staff to help visitors to develop their creative skills
- experiential exhibits that respond to individual preferences
- content created by the public as well as staff
- digital cameras and other equipment for use on site
- facilities for the public to reach and interpret the collections
- interactive web sites with participatory exhibits and resources
- seamless connections between the physical and virtual museum, and with cultural and educational institutions worldwide

Many museums also need guidelines on good practice in the production of digital learning media as well as some examples of well-documented and successful flagship projects from which they can learn. The active engagement of museum agencies in the field and new funding from the Lottery, may enable both of these needs to be met over the next few years. These would enable museums to move beyond the provision of large quantities of images and information, to the development of learning resources which have real educational value - projects driven by the learning needs of the public, not by collections management systems and the data they contain.

‘I am worried about replacing artefacts with information about objects. There is a dimension of objects which resists interpretation. I’ve found some of the most exciting and enduring things when ‘lost’ in the V&A. It is very important that the technology should bring people back to the objects. What I’d like to do whenever I’m going around the V&A is to plug into a point in the wall and be able to interrogate the artefact, have my questions answered, and to accumulate my own observations in a two-way process’.

Tim Benton, art historian, 1995

A Skilled Workforce

Target 3: To develop the educational capabilities of staff, volunteers and others who work for the museum

The future for museum development lies not in isolated specialisms but in core teams of highly trained and experienced staff, able to work flexibly on a variety of multi-disciplinary museum projects. Such staff require interpersonal and management skills that will enable them to work in partnership with the public and with professionals from other organisations.

The roles of different specialists

Excellence in museum education depends on excellence in other specialisms. The expertise of staff such as conservators, marketing and administrative staff, attendants and curators is essential for individual education projects as well as the long-term development of education provision.

Institutions provide resources and develop policies, but it is individuals who through their actions, attitudes and values decide the success or failure of all educational developments. Whatever the formal policies of their own institution, every member of staff has responsibility to serve the learning needs of society as a part of their regular duties. Acceptance by curators and other staff who are not education specialists of an educational role carries with it the responsibility to achieve professional standards in their educational work. In order to fulfil this, they must make a personal commitment to professional development and training in museum education.

Excellence in museum education also requires high calibre specialist museum educators. Museum education is a complex and challenging field. It demands of its practitioners expertise in the relevant collections and subject disciplines, understanding of the theory and practice of education in society, and skills in the use of museum resources for lifelong formal and informal learning across a wide spectrum of audiences.

Museum education specialists, like others who manage a museum-wide function, have four main responsibilities: the development of an institutional policy and plan for the specialism; leading by example the practice of the specialism, drawing on the latest research; training and guiding others who will deliver the service; and monitoring and evaluating the range and quality of provision. Museums need museum educators working within their institutions who can provide models of teaching, learning and thinking in the field. Such expertise is developed

only through training and extensive experience inside and outside museums over a number of years. There is no substitute for this.

The responsibilities described above are core museum functions and can only be carried out by someone who is a full member of staff at a senior level, and whose contribution is integral to the process of strategic development and development of the institution. Without the guiding hand of an experienced museum educator, the educational efforts of museums are liable to be ad hoc, reactive and at worst inappropriate and misdirected.

CASE STUDY: DEVELOPING THE SKILLS OF CURATORS:

South Eastern Museums Education Unit

The South Eastern Museums Education Unit (SEMEU) was established by the South Eastern Museums Service with external funding to support education work in this region. SEMEU seeks to raise the profile of museum education by promoting greater access to under-used collections and by assisting curators in developing the education potential and use of museum objects.

'Light Fantastic' involved SEMEU working with curators in six museums to develop science sessions for schools. The Cuming Museum, one of those which took part in the project, is located in a deprived inner city area where most schools struggle with limited resources. The curator felt that education is one of their most positive and important roles. The 'Light Fantastic' project was an opportunity to develop an interactive, workshop-based session for schools at the museum. Studying science and technology, rather than reinforcing stereotypes that museums are for history, was also an advantage.

By running six programmes on the same theme there were economies of scale. It was possible to produce generic support material for schools, as well as material specific to each museum and also to jointly produce a high quality promotional leaflet. Curators were trained to run sessions themselves, using museum objects; the sessions could then be offered to schools on an ongoing basis.

The project stimulated an interest in working with schools and in at least two of the museums led to other new programmes being developed. The Cuming Museum now has 3 popular science sessions for schools; 'Switched On' was developed in conjunction with SEMEU and COPUS (Committee on the Public Understanding of Science), and 'Material Madness' with the help of a freelance education consultant.

Just under half of museum educators, while often bringing a wealth of experience of formal education from earlier employment, have five years or less experience in a new specialism which requires significant additional knowledge and skills. (This professional profile is consistent with the recent rapid expansion in the number of museum education posts). In addition, most museum educators are limited in the kind of work they are expected to undertake, which is almost entirely the delivery of education programmes. Most are allowed, or allow themselves, little time for reflection and research.

Museums may have the education specialists they want, but not yet the ones they will require. The profession needs people who are prepared, over the next five to ten years, to transform themselves beyond the restrictions of their own jobs into changers and influencers throughout their institutions. If this is to happen, the initiative must come from museum educators themselves as well as their institutions.

Previous experience of museum education specialists

163 museum staff whose role or main responsibility is the provision of education services provided details of their experience previous to their current post, in response to the second questionnaire.

Teaching in schools	80%
Teaching in further education/higher education	23%
Adult education	33%
Other educational work	25%
Previous museum education	28%
Other museum (curatorial or other) work	31%
Other relevant experience	35%

61% of respondents had been in their present posts for five years or less.

Newly-appointed museum educators, and especially those who are the only education specialists in their institution, would benefit from regular contact (in effect, informal apprenticeships) with more experienced museum educators in their area. Coaching and learning by doing are essential for their development.

Museum educators at all stages of their careers would also benefit from continued contact with the work of others, and from constructive peer reviews. There is also a particular need in a new field such as museum education for senior professionals to contribute actively, through visiting fellowships and other means, to the development of the sector.

Institutions with limited resources

A variety of strategies have been adopted by small museums to enable them to employ an education specialist. One approach is to form consortia to share the cost; in some parts of the United Kingdom, AMCs have seed-funded such appointments in partnership with local authorities. Some local authorities have employed museum educators to support the museums in their area, even when they themselves do not manage a museum service. Elsewhere, museum education specialists have trained curatorial, volunteer and freelance staff to deliver education programmes. While these initiatives do not provide museums with the dedicated education specialists they need, they all represent a significant step forward for museums which previously made little provision for education.

Freelance staff

Many museums depend upon the skills of freelance museum educators and artists to enhance their service to the public. These freelance staff often lack the infrastructure of support for professional development that is available to staff who are directly employed. Some museums, recognising this, have provided training programmes for those freelance staff who work in museums in their area.

Diversity amongst staff

If museums are to meet the educational needs of a pluralistic society, they require staff and members of governing bodies who reflect the diversity of their communities. They must also make a special effort to attract people from under-represented groups. There is a particular need for the ethnic mix of museum staff to be monitored.

Volunteer programmes

Volunteer programmes and membership schemes can also be effective ways to engage communities actively in the work of museums. The results of the first questionnaire survey indicate that perhaps one in three museums employs volunteers in its educational work. Yet it seems that volunteer programmes are rarely seen as developmental initiatives. Instead, volunteers are often not properly contracted and trained, and may be used as a cheap alternative to professionally qualified education specialists.

Training and development

As the MGC's *Guidelines* on museum education emphasise, the training of museum staff is the key to the improvement of standards. The learning needs of the public should be a high priority in every aspect of staff policy, from recruitment criteria and the content of job

descriptions to training. Yet the first questionnaire revealed that, where education is concerned, management expectations of the staff they employed, and the investment they made in their subsequent development, are low. It is no more appropriate to expose the public to educational provision planned and delivered by untrained and inexperienced staff than it would be to use unqualified staff to conserve a work of art.

CHNTO's occupational standards of competence and related national vocational qualifications have contributed significantly to improvements in services for museum visitors. They provide staff with a training framework that reflects their need for networked rather than isolated knowledge and skills. There is, however, a need for more thinking and research on the different training needs of education specialists and other staff who deliver education, and also on the characteristics of the effective educational practitioner. This research would enable CHNTO to ensure that the needs of all staff are addressed, and that an appropriate level of competence in museum education is included in the mandatory standards of performance for all museum staff.

The MA's arrangements for Continual Professional Development are equally important. They recommend the kind of learning – self-directed learning and development of the intelligence which is embedded in skilful practice – which this report advises should also be offered by museums to the public. It is also significant that whereas few museum education specialists registered for the MA's old diploma, about one quarter of the 400 people currently registered to study for the new AMA (Associate of the Museums Association) are educators.

Many new entrants to the museum profession come to their first appointment after gaining a qualification from one of the many museum studies courses that have developed in recent years. The coverage of the theory and practice of museum education of some museum studies courses is good, but at other institutions it is superficial and inadequate. It is essential that museum education should be a core element in all undergraduate and post-graduate museum studies courses.

Research and Evaluation

Target 4: To make research and evaluation of public learning an integral part of museum practice

Research and evaluation of public learning should be the life blood of museum practice. They can save museums from wasting money on ineffective galleries and services, and enable them to prove to funders that the institution is fully committed to improving the quality of the public's experience of the museum. They release a museum from a cycle of repeated mistakes; an institution which does not engage in some way with visitors' learning cannot enhance their experience.

For most museum staff, such engagement is as informed consumers of the research and evaluation done by others, but a limited number are also active evaluators and researchers. Museums need both kinds of engagement if they are to thrive. At present, there is far too little of either.

'There is nothing as practical as a good theory.'

Eric Sotto, teacher and writer, 1994

Learning research

In terms of formal research activities, museums in the United Kingdom are heavily dependent on work done in the United States; the number of museums here which publish research on museum learning is very small. In fact, museum staff conduct more learning research than this implies. Research studies by consultants and postgraduate students, and research undertaken by staff as part of their daily work, mostly remain unpublished.

Museum educators in the United Kingdom are first and foremost practitioners. The profession of museum education is based on what the educational researcher Israel Scheffler has called 'practical theory', because it is not a single field of enquiry but the common focus of many different disciplines, is enacted in everyday life, and is governed by ethics and values. Most museum education specialists (and many other staff) conduct action research as part of their daily work, but it is so closely integrated with other activities such as teaching and the preparation of learning resources that they would not even identify it as research, despite the fact that over a professional career it amounts to a substantial body of new thinking.

Like the tacit knowledge many curators acquire through constant contact with objects, this tacit knowledge of visitor learning is often insufficiently valued, because it does not conform to the conventions of published research. Instead, it is handed on to other professionals through demonstrations of good practice and the informal apprenticeship of less-experienced colleagues.

Both the status and nature of learning research in museums are now changing. At one time it was usual to regard research in museums as a hierarchical, sequential process. Knowledge flowed as factual information from experts, who made their discoveries available to the public. Today, an increasing number of museums are replacing this model with one that acknowledges that both staff and public can have expertise, and are engaged in the same process of learning from the collections.

Until recently, learning research was largely practitioner-led and attracted little academic attention. Now, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists, economists, psychologists, cultural historians and scientists, as well as education academics, are becoming interested in the field. Museums offer one of the best locations for research on informal public learning. The involvement of academic researchers might enormously enrich museum learning, provided the research agenda does not move out of the gallery and the community centre into the university office. The most positive outcome would be for the centre of gravity of museum learning research to remain in museum practice (its present strength), but for those who participate to include university researchers, action researchers from the adult education sector, youth and community education sectors and other researchers, as well as new generations of urban planners, librarians and others concerned with public learning in cultural institutions.

The museum sector is becoming increasingly aware that it can only retain its intellectual credibility if it keeps abreast of these developments. This will require a change of philosophy, funding and research practice throughout the sector and, within individual institutions, the contribution of a range of different museum specialisms. Institutions will no longer be able to regard collections research as essential, but learning research as optional. The greatest challenge, however, will be to museum education specialists, who may need a generation to develop into a self-sustaining research community.

A possible agenda for museum learning research

The following are some examples of long-term or generic research needed by the museum sector identified at colloquia for this report:

- identifying trends in society relevant to museums;
- the contribution of museums and museum education to cultural development of urban and rural communities;
- methods of identifying the value of learning in museums;
- the long-term impact of childhood participation in museums on later engagement in the sciences, humanities and arts;
- the effectiveness of inter-cultural education programmes in museums;
- how the skills of visitors in learning from objects and works of art can be developed;
- the nature of visitors' learning experience in galleries, and how this is integrated into people's lives;
- how teachers, tutors and other educators use museums with their groups, and how they could be helped to use them better;
- how children, families, adults and other informal learners use museums;
- how the role of parents in children's learning can be supported;
- how to increase access and participation for under-represented groups;
- the social impact of admission charges on schools and other groups;
- the specific learning needs of key museum audiences;
- the contribution of museums to learning in the formal education sector;
- the potential for collaboration between museums and libraries;
- the benefits of informal learning;
- how attendants and other staff working in the galleries can most effectively promote learning;
- the development of new evaluation methodologies;
- quantitative, in-depth, national studies on the audience currently attending museums;
- the value of comparative studies and how their effectiveness might be improved;
- how museums teach values through their galleries and other educational provision;
- how museums teach visitors about the nature of subject disciplines through their galleries; and
- the development of improved access for people with intellectual, sensory and emotional needs and disabilities.

Research into museum learning faces a structural problem, which is that no one is responsible for the long-term studies that are needed in order to identify the impact of museum learning through childhood and adulthood. Yet research such as this is vital to inform policy-making, and would benefit the whole sector. A national agenda for learning research is required, and a national research strategy which the museum sector itself should lead, supported by a research fund.

The sector also needs to ensure that there are published guidelines, supported by training courses, on using and conducting research on learning in museums, to help staff make this part of their regular work. In addition, more opportunities are needed for publication of learning research studies in academic journals, and more regular colloquia where these studies can be discussed.

A research community needs one or more academic centres specialising in its field to provide leadership in research, teaching, and advice to the profession, and to ensure that quality in practice is matched by rigorous academic standards. Such a centre or centres should also, as a service to the profession, create a database of current research projects on museum learning in the United Kingdom.

A recent survey of members of ENGAGE found that the most urgent need for practising gallery educators was a national resource centre holding books, reports and other materials on gallery education. An academic centre on museum learning should, therefore, have a comprehensive holding of existing literature in the field, and should be accessible to the whole profession as a service. It could also provide both academic and vocational courses on museum learning. The decision of the Museums & Galleries Commission to fund the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester to open a Centre for Museum Education will provide the sector with an invaluable professional resource.

Evaluation of learning

Museums conduct evaluation of their education provision more often than they conduct learning research, but a majority of museums still undertake no evaluation. The most common forms of evaluation are questionnaires and interviews with users. Peer reviews and focus group discussions are less common.

Many evaluation studies conducted by museums have assumed that visitors wish to learn the facts and concepts thought by the museum to be important. This is an approach which takes no

account of visitors' own interests or purposes. There is an urgent need for more museums to adopt alternative methodologies of evaluation that reflect current thinking on museum learning. One particularly fruitful approach now well established outside the museum sector is the social audit, which involves users and non-users in developing the criteria for evaluation. The publication by East Midlands Museums Service in 1996 of *Improving Museum Learning*, the result of research led by the University of Leicester on models for evaluation, has also helped to fill this gap.

Museum staff need printed guidelines and training courses on evaluation, as they do on learning research.

Comparative studies

Comparative studies enable museums to learn from best practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom and abroad. The full significance of new methodologies used in gallery design or education programmes can only be understood by seeing and experiencing them in practice and at first-hand. This can best be achieved through study visits, exchanges, or attendance at international professional meetings. Some museums in the United States also offer visiting fellowships, which enable overseas experts to work alongside their staff on a new project. Museums can choose from many options the approach which best suits their needs.

Two-thirds of museums with education services responding to the second questionnaire had undertaken no comparative studies in the previous five years. This cannot be explained entirely by cost, because grants for overseas professional travel often remain under-subscribed. It is likely that some museum managers regard international contacts as an expensive luxury. If so, this is to ignore the costs of not knowing what is happening, for example, in terms of lost opportunities for development of professional expertise and European Community grants.

There are both educational and commercial reasons for taking comparative studies very seriously. The history and cultural diversity of the United Kingdom and the spread of the English language have created a potential for cultural exchange that is greater than for most other countries. The cultural sector of the economy now competes in a European and global market; about 20 million people come to the United Kingdom each year, and many of them visit museums.

For individual museums, there are a number of direct benefits from comparative studies. Exposure to the work of overseas museums provides staff with fresh insights and new ideas,

and encourages them to question their own methodologies and consider a wide range of approaches before embarking on new initiatives. An understanding of the dominant educational methodologies in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world also enables museums to develop more appropriate provision for minority communities from these regions in the United Kingdom.

The problem with comparative studies is not their value in principle, but variable standards of implementation. Comparative studies are research activities and should be conducted in a professional manner. They should have clear objectives, and the benefits should be passed on to other museum professionals and audiences. Too often, they do not meet these standards. There is a need for guidelines on good practice, based on research on the effectiveness of current activities.



The power of real objects: handling of Roman artefacts.
(Photo: Reading Museum Service)

Lifelong Learning

Target 5: To support visitor learning at every stage of life through informal learning, formal education and training

If museums are to be effective as educational institutions, they must provide opportunities for all who might use them to learn at every stage of their educational development from early childhood to old age.

An essential first step for museums is to identify the learning needs and current participation of existing and potential audiences. Every museum has a unique audience, defined by the nature of the institution and the characteristics of the communities of which it is part. No museum can target provision to priority groups and develop this successfully if it has not researched and understood the distinctive requirements of its public.

‘As an educational resource in the widest possible sense, museum collections constitute a national asset which has been persistently undervalued. Their contribution to the informal learning process can never be quantified in absolute terms but it constitutes an irreplaceable element in the quality of life offered to society.’

Museums Association, 1991

Working with communities

Communities provide an important context for lifelong learning. Most people are members of not one but many communities – defined by geography, religion, ethnicity, age, occupation, disability, or personal or leisure interest, for example. Many people now look beyond their locality for their community affiliations. But significant numbers also retain a strong sense of identity with the place in which they live, and the poorest sectors of society in particular remain tied, by necessity rather than choice, to their immediate environment.

Museums rightly emphasise the importance of the gallery experience which the public can enjoy only by visiting the museum itself. Some museum staff are concerned that museum community programmes may take museums beyond their natural physical and philosophical boundaries. There is clearly a balance to be struck here, but it is evident that it is difficult for museums to meet community needs effectively if they remain within the walls of their buildings, which are often located in civic and commercial centres. People’s lack of self-

confidence or interest is not removed by a press release alone. Museums must go out into their communities if they are to break down barriers to access for many non-visitors, including those from ethnic minorities or those living in areas with multiple characteristics of disadvantage. Yet the second questionnaire survey found that schools are the main beneficiaries of museums' work in their communities. Few museums, it seems, use community work in a developmental way.

CASE STUDY: ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES:

'Going Wild at Queensferry', Scottish Museums Council/South Queensferry Museum

The Scottish Museums Council's Environmental Initiative is a fixed-term 3 year programme focusing its efforts on supporting a series of demonstration projects based at member museums. 'Going Wild at Queensferry' was one of three projects in 1995/96, the second year of the initiative.

South Queensferry Museum is run by Edinburgh District Council Museum Service. The museum service had already worked with the district council's ranger service and was keen to repeat this co-operation for developing displays on the environment. It was also felt that an environmental project would provide a good focus for encouraging greater community involvement with the museum.

The museum and ranger service linked up with local primary schools, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Scottish Wildlife Trust to research and develop guided walks, trail leaflets and new displays which were not only about the local environment but also about how local groups explored it for themselves. It was very important to the voluntary groups that the museum was able to celebrate the work that they had done.

This project is an interesting example of partnerships between museums and community and environmental groups. The links may not seem ground-breaking yet it is often as difficult for a museum to build a relationship with another, quite different, local authority service as with an outside body. In this case both services shared the same motivation to work with the local community. The displays are popular and still much used at the museum, as well as being cited as an example of good practice by the Scottish Museums Council.