



Dr. Michael Dixon
Chair, NMDC Learning and Access Committee

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

4 February 2008

Dear Paul,

National Museums - contributing to the Cultural Offer

The National Museum Directors strongly support the introduction of the Cultural Offer for young people. We welcome the Minister's recognition of the powerful role creative and cultural activities can play in improving educational and social outcomes for children and the close working relationship between Departments.

The past ten years have seen a revolution in museum education. National museums have placed learning at the core of their ethos and developed extensive programmes and learning opportunities. There were over eight million child visits to DCMS-sponsored museums in 2006-7, and in the same year the Science Museum alone reached 317,382 children through on and off-site organised educational sessions. We are in an excellent position to help deliver on the cultural offer and we look forward to being fully and strategically included in the plans.

To ensure the most innovative and engaging programme possible, we urge you to take an open-minded and flexible approach to design and delivery. We are concerned that the proposed commissioning model may stifle creativity and free-thinking in programme design. In particular, we believe that:

- Bids should not be limited to Local Authorities. Any provider, including museums themselves, should be able to apply for funding – to be judged on the merit of their offer.
- Regional engagement is important, but there should also be room for 'national' programmes. The wealth of our national collections belong to all our nation's children. A national programme could also take advantage of the digital offer, an exciting new frontier in cultural and creative provision for young people.

In our experience, unlike the Strategic Commissioning model, the Creative Partnerships model has not been fully inclusive of the National Museums, missing out on their tremendous depth of experience and breadth of potential, and has focused too

exclusively on classroom based learning. If this model is adopted for delivery of the Cultural Offer, we suggest:

- The Programme Board should take a strategic approach to the involvement of the National Museums in order to take full advantage of their experience and facilities. For instance, Local Authorities could be obliged to seek partnerships with National Museums.
- The positive promotion of cultural engagement *outside* the classroom. Research shows that museum visits have an overwhelmingly positive impact on children, particularly the most disadvantaged and those who do not respond well to classroom-based learning.

We would like to work with you to ensure that the National Museums are fully included in the Cultural Offer. I look forward to hearing from you how best to take this discussion forward.

Yours sincerely


Dr. Michael Dixon
Chair of NMDC Learning and Access Committee

cc Alan Clarke, Department for Children, Schools and Families