



Mark Jones, Chair

Barbara Follett, MP
Minister for Culture, Creative Industries & Tourism
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

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Tourism Policy Review

NMDC welcomes the government's renewed focus on tourism, and recognition of culture's contribution to that industry, as evidenced in the Prime Minister's and the Culture Secretary's speeches in Liverpool last week. We warmly welcome your invitation to engage in a dialogue on tourism strategy and policy development.

Tourism is important to museums. Our national museums are both major beneficiaries of income from overseas visitors¹ and drivers of British tourism². Museums play a significant role in attracting tourists and in building the British brand. We know that overseas visitors have a very positive experience when they visit our museums³. We are also aware that museums have a particular role to play in, for instance, countering seasonality through programming, in attracting younger and more diverse audiences, in encouraging visitors to the regions, and in improving the 2012 'offer'.

The recent Visit Britain paper *'Achieving the full potential of the visitor economy'* reports that the tourist economy is a 'hidden giant' with potential for significant growth. The tourist economy will be of increasing importance in these difficult economic times and we believe that more must be done to capitalise on Britain's cultural offer, with leadership from the top and inclusion of museums in the development of tourism policy.

¹ For example, in 2007-08, 61% of visitors to the British Museum, 45% visitors to the National Gallery and 40% of visitors to the Natural History Museum were from overseas.

² According to research by the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, seven out of the top ten leading visitor attractions in the UK are national museums http://alva.org.uk/visitor_statistics/ and Tony Travers (NMDC, 2006) found that visits to Britain's major museums and galleries are 50 percent higher than the annual number of visits to the West End and Broadway theatres combined.

³ In 2007/08 39% of the total visits to the V&A were from overseas. Of these visitors 98% of them rated their overall visit as very good/good.

In particular we are concerned that the UK is at risk of falling behind as a venue for cultural tourism. Figures published by The Art Newspaper⁴ show that in 2007, for the third year in a row, visits to London's major exhibitions declined in relation to those in Paris, Tokyo, New York and Washington. Areas where we would like to see government action to help address this issue include:

- **Visitor profile:** Visitor numbers are falling, visitor age is rising and we feel that too little is being done to attract visitors from emerging economies such as China and India. In particular we are frustrated that expensive visas continue to be a major barrier to international visitors to Britain and ask the Government to take action on this issue. More could also be done via coordinated marketing and communications to capitalise on the museums' offer in attracting new and diverse audiences, for instance in showcasing the V&A's and the British Museum's world class Asian collections to potential visitors from those emerging economies and by highlighting the benefits of free admission.
- **Welcome:** We are concerned that the public realms in which the museums operate are poor by international standards. The Trafalgar Square scheme has significantly improved the visitor experience to major the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery. Yet other important museum environments such as Exhibition Road, home to three of the major national museums, remain neglected, with phases 2 and 3 of the RBKC project still to be fully funded and step-free access at South Kensington Underground station under threat. In addition, museum transport links, particularly outside London, are often inadequate and prohibitively expensive.

I look forward to continuing this dialogue and working together to promote British tourism.

⁴ The Art Newspaper, No.189, March 2008, Exhibition Attendance Figures 2007