

National Museums Directors' Conference

Cultural Diversity

Final Report and Recommendations

For presentation to NMDC Directors March 2006

Introduction

The Cultural Diversity Working Group was set up in 2004 and offered an Interim Report to the Directors' Conference in April 2005¹. Its purpose was to focus on the importance of the diversity of British culture (in relation to race, ethnicity and religion, rather than to disability, gender or sexual orientation), on how diverse cultures – particularly the heritage of African, African-Caribbean and Asian societies and communities - contribute to culture within the United Kingdom, and on the ways in which museums and galleries themselves can better contribute to cultural and social developments. Those developments include the greatly more diverse mix of the UK population, the demands for more inclusive representations of British history, as well as the recognition of its dependence on other countries and cultures, and the determination from cultural institutions not just to increase but also to widen cultural participation.

Three general recommendations were accepted by Conference:

A To ensure that cultural diversity, including the diversity of the museum's workforce, is overseen by a member of each senior team and reviewed as part of each museum's strategic plan.

B To review collections, research, exhibitions, public programmes and budgets on a continuing basis with the aim of achieving greater diversity in their use and to ensure that exhibitions and public programmes with a diversity aspect are funded over the long term rather than relying on project funding.

C To work with the Greater London Authority's Commission on African and Asian Heritage to support the implementation of the Commission's recommendations².

Two meetings were convened of representatives from all national museums and galleries, and the Working Group met on several further occasions. During our consultations and discussions the imperative for a step change in cultural diversity work and in workforce diversity within the national museums was apparent. This has been reinforced both by external events and by the enthusiasm of those with whom we have spoken within the museums themselves.

This final report offers a number of recommendations which will reinforce the changes taking place within national museums and galleries (and equally in regional and independent museums) and help link them better to important developments taking place within society as a whole.

¹ Available at <http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/diversity.html>

² Available at <http://www.almlondon.org.uk/news/index.cfm?ArticleID=1038&NavigationID=5>

Four principles emerged to guide the final recommendations:

- **Accountability:** National museums, while often having a broad international remit, are accountable to the whole nation in respecting and representing the diversity of cultural heritage.
- **Inclusivity:** National museums must follow both ethical and economic imperatives in promoting an inclusive use of collections and resources, and drawing in the widest range of participants.
- **Proportionality:** National museums have a statutory duty to promote race equality (under the amended Race Relations Act, 2001), and must reflect - within their own staffing and trustees - the cultural and racial mix of those they aim to serve, both regionally and nationally.
- **Creativity:** National museums should see cultural diversity development in collections, programming, audiences and staffing, as part of the commitment to innovation and the exploration of new experience that is fundamental to their work.

Summary of Recommendations:

- 1 (1.1) Work with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the English Regional Hubs to create a national **Cultural Diversity Network** (see **Appendix B**) to offer information, training, and the exchange of knowledge across the museums and galleries sector.
- 2 (1.2) Each national museum should set its **own goals for BME staffing** - and agree with its sponsoring department the minimum number of BME trustees appropriate for its governing body – and take responsibility for achieving those goals.
- 3 (1.3) Expand **targeted training and development opportunities**, such as the Diversify, Inspire and Global Graduates programmes.
- 4 (1.4) Support the **collection and publication of data on BME staffing and trustees** in national museums and galleries.
- 5 (2.1) Create more opportunities for the **loan of material from national collections**, within the UK and abroad, particularly to smaller, specialist cultural and community organisations, and offer reciprocal opportunities for such organisations to help in the interpretation and development of the national collections.
- 6 (2.2) Share **research and information** related to culturally diverse collections, displays, exhibitions and public programmes, including through the Cultural Diversity Network (1.1; see **Appendix B**).
- 7 (3.1) Develop and share **creative marketing initiatives** through the NMDC Marketing Group, with the support of DCMS and others.

8 (3.2) Work with DCMS and MLA to ensure **consistent and useable data** about BME audiences and participation is available across the sector.

9 (3.3) Each national museum should set its **own goals for numbers of BME visits and participants**, and then monitor the success with which they are achieved.

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1 Staffing, Governance and Training

The most prominent issue to emerge is the lack of diversity within the workforce of the museums sector. An updated summary of a sample of national museums is included as **Appendix A**. In recent public presentations, the Minister for Culture has referred to the situation as 'dire' and called on the sector to show determination in creating the kind of changes now beginning to be visible in the health and law sectors. While there is considerable diversity in areas such as visitor services and administration, the staffing in curatorial, education and senior management is more mono-cultural.

Some change is already taking place, but the national museums must energetically show the way in supporting schemes for training and development, and linking better with the broadening of participation within the higher education sector. Private sector initiatives in law and banking also demonstrate the importance of taking steps to increase interest amongst secondary school students. Good quality training and development schemes will not only help the sector as a whole but also provide a wider range of future candidates for more specialist and senior posts that are required within museums and galleries. Staffing goals set by each national museum – relating as appropriate to BME proportions of the population regionally for more general staffing and nationally for more specialist staffing - together with plans for achieving those goals, will be the most effective way of ensuring progress. Change will take time and goals might be set for five or ten year intervals ahead.

In addition to schemes targeted to black or minority ethnic candidates, the representatives from national museums have called for additional training and support for a wider range of staff, as well as access to examples of good practice and resources. Recent discussions about the additional spending on cultural leadership have also reinforced the importance of emphasising diversity within leadership schemes of all kinds.

The DCMS must be seen to ensure support for the appointment of more diverse trustees to the governing bodies of the national museums and galleries in England. Similar principles apply in appointments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Recommendations:

1.1 Work with MLA, and the English Regional Hubs, to create a wider Cultural Diversity Network (see **Appendix B**) to offer information, training, and the exchange of knowledge across the museums and galleries sector.

1.2 Each national museum should set its own goals for BME staffing - and agree with its sponsoring department the minimum number of BME trustees appropriate for its governing body – and take responsibility for achieving those goals.

1.3 Expand targeted training and development opportunities, such as the Diversify, Inspire and Global Graduates programmes.

1.4 Support the collection and publication of data on BME staffing and trustees in national museums and galleries.

2 Collections and Public Programmes

Many examples of more culturally diverse collecting, display, interpretation and public programming can now be cited. Many more are in development, and there is no lack of enthusiasm for creating opportunities for presenting new areas of cultural heritage in innovative and more diverse ways, whether through displays, loan exhibitions, projects, talks, workshops or events.

However, there is considerable evidence that this activity is not sufficiently consistent or continuous. Initiatives such as Black History Month, although important in raising awareness, are increasingly seen as tokenist and even patronising. There is also the matter of scale. Black and Asian events and displays, outside the larger-scale world collections such as the V&A, the Horniman Museum and the British Museum, are limited but could be enlarged with loans, and improved with the input of historians and links with community based collections. The Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage³ points to a number of opportunities that exist for development. It also recommends closer collaboration between smaller and larger institutions, and museums and collections of different types.

Participation from the national museums and galleries in collaboration with smaller, regional and local organisations, whether as lenders or borrowers should reinforce the principle of creativity, and particularly mark the next phase of development in terms of presentation and interpretation.

The national museums have already given considerable emphasis to wider recognition for their international work and the opportunities for closer collaboration with DCMS and other government departments⁴. One critical aspect of this involves seeking to make active the debates about cultural exchange, the sharing of expertise and the opportunity for UK museums and galleries to be in the forefront of engagement with museums and galleries in non-western countries, whose culture is represented in collections in this country. This theme is also reinforced in the preparations for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic programmes.

Cultural priorities in Scotland and Wales are dominated by questions of cultural distinctiveness, in which language and traditions play a particular role. The Working Group sensed a strong determination from some to ensure that minority cultures could play a full and creative part in that distinctiveness.

Recommendations:

2.1 Create more opportunities for the loan of material from national collections, within the UK and abroad, particularly to smaller, specialist cultural and community organisations, and offer reciprocal opportunities for such organisations to help in the interpretation and development of the national collections.

2.2 Share research and information related to culturally diverse collections, displays, exhibitions and public programmes, including through the Cultural Diversity Network (1.1; see **Appendix B**).

³ Available at <http://www.almlondon.org.uk/news/index.cfm?ArticleID=1038&NavigationID=5>

⁴ See NMDC Report on International Working:
http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/images/publications/int_dimensions.pdf

3 Audiences and Participation

Attracting a wider and more diverse range of visitors and participants from within the UK is a major challenge for all the national museums and galleries. All the evidence demonstrates a low rate of participation from among BME communities⁵. Equally, all reports indicate that high quality, consistent and properly resourced programmes will overcome scepticism, build interest and, over time, create trust and loyalty.

The critical message is that more culturally diverse programmes – whether displays, exhibitions or education activities – should be presented for everyone. This activity is part of the mainstream of a museum or gallery's work, and not simply marginalised as being of specialist or esoteric interest. Africa 05 demonstrated this well through its wide-ranging events and exhibitions and activities. However, this message will need to be reinforced over the years ahead.

The central message of inclusivity - in terms of seeking the widest audience, both socially and culturally, for more diverse content - must be matched with a second message of drawing in a wider social spread of visitors, including more Black and Minority Ethnic audiences, for what the museum and gallery offers as a whole. It is the combination of the two messages that will be successful in changing the rates of participation and visiting. The experience of the BBC is useful here in terms of demonstrating how cultural diversity should be part of public service delivery in the 21st century through a visible range of presenters and characters in regular programmes, as well as offering more specialist and niche services that will serve particular audiences and are edited by those who can speak for and relate to the relevant communities. Such a mix of messages also demonstrates that audience development cannot be isolated either from education and access issues, nor from staffing and training issues.

It is essential that there should be good consistent data, which requires common agreement across national museums and galleries, and with MLA and DCMS, and the allocation of resources. Equally important is the further development of inspiring marketing campaigns, which require a range of creative input, that is likely to come both from inside and from outside the sector, and should link with staff development opportunities. Sharing experience from pilot audience development schemes will be important.

Recommendations:

3.1 Develop and share creative marketing initiatives through the NMDC Marketing Group, with the support of DCMS and others.

3.2 Work with DCMS and MLA to ensure consistent and useable data about BME audiences and participation is available across the sector.

3.3 Each national museum should set its own goals for numbers of BME visits and participants, and then monitor the success with which they are achieved.

⁵ e.g. *Holding Up The Mirror*, London Museums Agency, 2003, http://www.lmal.org.uk/uploads/documents/Holding_up_the_mirror.pdf

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Appendices

A Staffing within a sample of national museums

An extract of summary figures from the Mayor’s Commission on African and Asian Heritage (updated for 2006):

Gallery or museum	Overall Staffing			Education and Interpretation		
	Staff	BME staff	Overall BME %	Education/ Interpretation	BME Ed/Interpret	BME %
Nat Portrait Gallery	201	13	6.47%	13	1	7.69%
British Museum	915	169	18.47%	40	3	7.50%
Liverpool Museums	616	10	1.62%	59	1	1.69%
Tate	738	65	8.81%	54	3	5.55%
Museum of London	210	24	11.43%	13	1	7.69%
Mus/London in Docklds	42	8	19.05%	3	1	33.33%
V&A	694	82	11.82%	59	9	15.25%
Nat Maritime Museum	441	51	11.56%	20	1	5.00%
Total	3857	422	10.94%	261	20	7.66%

Gallery or museum	Curatorial staffing			Senior Management*		
	Curators	BME curators	BME %	Senior Managers	BME Snr Man	BME %
Nat Portrait Gallery	7	0	0%	7	0	0%
British Museum	92	5	5.43%	36	0	0%
Liverpool Museums	33	0	0%	12	1	8.33%
Tate	54	0	0%	44	0	0%
Museum of London	34	1	2.94%	5	0	0%
Mus/London in Docks	0	0	0%	1	0	0%
V&A	114	8	7.02%	15	0	0%
Nat Maritime Museum	22	1	4.55%	34	1	2.94%
Total	356	15	4.21%	154	2	1.30%

*Senior managers defined as those with a direct report to the Director or part of the senior management team

Gallery or museum	Trustees		
	Board Members	BME Board Members	%
Nat Portrait Gallery	16	2	12.5%
British Museum	22	4	18.18%
Liverpool Museums	23	3	13.04%
Tate	12	1	8.33%
Museum of London	18	1	5.56%
Mus/London Docklds	18	1	5.56%
V&A	14	1	7.14%
Nat Maritime Museum	17	2	11.76%
Total	140	15	10.71%

B Proposal for a national cultural diversity network

Background

Discussions at the NMDC Cultural Diversity Working Group have led the group to conclude that there would be merit in a national cultural diversity network to build in and complement the regional diversity networks. This note contains some preliminary thoughts about the network.

Purpose

The main purpose of the network would be to enable museum staff to share experience, work together and develop skills to ensure that their museums improve their performance in cultural diversity.

Membership

Crucially the network would encompass regional and national museums. Cultural Diversity is such a critical issue for museums that it needs to be addressed by the entire sector; the national network would contribute to achieving a genuinely cross-museum approach.

There needs to be consideration given to whether the network is aimed primarily at staff with a *strategic* responsibility for cultural diversity, or with *operational* responsibility. It may be that the network itself is for staff at a more strategic level, but many of the activities (particularly training and development activities) it undertakes are aimed at operational-level staff.

The network would include representatives (for instance chairs or relevant regional agency staff) from the regional diversity networks as well as staff from museums (mainly larger museums, national and non-national) with a high level of interest in improving their diversity performance. Membership would be open to all those with appropriate responsibilities who were interested; (many people would probably prefer to become/remain members of their regional network). If the numbers in the network were larger than 20-30, an inner group – or series of subgroups - could be appointed/elected to oversee much of the organisational work, with the full group meeting less often

Scope

It is suggested that the network focuses on cultural diversity defined as race/ethnicity. This is because the network needs focus if it is to be successful and also because there are many individuals, organisations, policy initiatives and practices that are particular to issues of racial diversity, rather than diversity defined more generally. While there are overlaps between the approach to different areas of diversity, race is also a clear and distinct field that merits separate treatment. Diversification in museums presents particular issues that are different from those in most libraries and archives.

Activities

To a large extent, the policy argument is now won and many museums recognise the need to improve their performance in the area of culture diversity (although perhaps do not recognise the urgency of the task). However, practical action is severely lacking. Perhaps the first and most urgent task is to build the skills and confidence of museum staff so that they feel able to undertake more work to diversify what museums do.

The network would do several things:

- Provide a forum for network members to share expertise
- Provide a forum for regional co-ordinators to work together and link with national initiatives
- Be a focus for sector expertise and design programmes for and contribute to diversity training, awareness raising, advice, support, benchmarking, data collection, etc for the wider museum community in all areas in need of diversification – audience development, collections and displays and workforce and governance
- Link with implementation of the recommendations from the GLA Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage.
- Provide a focus for museums to link to other sectors and engage with, for example, DCMS and other national organisations interested in museums and cultural diversity, such as the Black and Asian Studies Association, HLF and the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Diasporas, Migration and Identities Programme
- Potentially initiate joint projects
- Potentially lead discussion and debate within the sector

Organisation/funding

The network will need a small secretariat – at least a part-time member of staff; more as its work increases.

Leadership and funding might be from MLA, with a contribution from NMDC. Potentially the network itself could fundraise to increase its activities, although it would be most effective if it does not have to fundraise for the first two years.

March 2006