

NATIONAL MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES: THE IMPACTS AND THE NEEDS

A summary of findings

Introduction

The UK's national museums and galleries were established, largely between the mid eighteenth century and the early twentieth century, for the benefit of the whole nation. They are, at their core, repositories of objects: material evidence of the human made and natural worlds, and they are internationally pre-eminent. By various Acts of Parliament, they have been charged with preserving, exhibiting, researching and adding to the objects that make up their collections, for current and successive generations.

Their collections enable these institutions to be centres of learning and subject expertise, with collecting and interpreting inextricably linked to conservation and research. Neither can be adequately discharged without the other. These institutions have a responsibility to maintain both: if they do not, they represent at best dormant and at worst decaying assets.

The millions who gain physical, intellectual and online access to the collections each year can readily appreciate these outputs and the associated responsibilities: these functions are, perhaps, what the public expects of museums and understands as their role.

However, what is perhaps less well appreciated is the extent to which they make important and often surprising contributions in many other areas. They act, at once, as subject experts, educators, businesses and mass tourist attractions, enhancing education and learning opportunities, cultural and economic life, creativity and enjoyment for everyone in the country and beyond. While there are resourcing issues for all museums as they face these challenges, these activities demonstrate the ever-broadening spectrum across which they add value.

The National Museum Directors' Conference, in commissioning the three major, independent pieces of work summarised here, has brought together a great wealth of evidence which very strongly makes the case for increased state funding of these national institutions.

The three reports: *Valuing Museums* by Tony Travers of London School of Economics, *Creative Engagement* by LSE Cities Team and *National Dimensions* by AEA Consulting, highlight the nature and extent of museums' increasing activity levels over a period in which Grant-in-Aid has eroded in real terms.

Working on frames, Conservation Department, National Galleries of Scotland



The evidence

The UK's national museums, galleries, libraries and archives constitute a large and dynamic sector making an extraordinary cultural, educational, social and economic impact. They contribute to a wide variety of government policy objectives including those of DCMS, DfES, DoH, ODPM, MOD, DEFRA, DTI, the Home Office, the FCO, the RDAs and DfID, as well as their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In particular:

- Using Treasury formulae, the LSE found the wider economic impact of the NMDC "sector" alone is at least £2bn.
- At £320m the "exports" of this sector are similar to those of the whole of the music and visual and performing arts sectors.
- NMDC institutions had an overall turnover of £715 million in 2003-04.
- Spending generated by visitors to NMDC institutions is estimated to be at least £565 million.
- NMDC museums, galleries, archives and libraries, through their collections, expertise, programmes and exhibitions are major attractions for both domestic and international tourism, with foreign visitors citing museums and galleries as being amongst the prime reasons for them coming to the UK.
- The NMDC institutions employ in the region of 10,000 people directly, with the numbers of those employed in dependant, related industries adding a further 20,000.
- Through developments such as Tate Modern (which according to McKinsey generated £100m worth of economic activity and 3,000 new jobs), the National Railway Museum's Shildon development, the Royal Armouries in Leeds, Imperial War Museum North and the proposed Exhibition Road development in London, they contribute enormously to urban, economic and social regeneration as well as acting as patrons and clients of life-enhancing public architecture and space.

Imperial War Museum North



Measuring a skull, Natural History Museum



- In structured learning and access programmes, both on-site and outreach, they will host and inspire over 1.72 million school children in the year 2003-04, as well as promoting lifelong learning and social cohesion. At the same time, a total of at least 6.1 million children visited a museum in 2002. This is while, of course, retaining their commitment to academic excellence, having published between them 1173 refereed journal articles in 2002-03.
- They act as innovative centres for the learning and teaching of all needs, with 3 million on-site learners and 5.6 million off-site learners in 2002. From the British Library's use of the original letters of Oliver Cromwell, to The National Archives' *21st Century Citizen* website and the National Maritime Museum's provision of online resources for business studies and leisure, travel and tourism courses, these institutions are finding new ways to inspire all ages and abilities.
- The NMDC's institutions perform a unique function as an objective and independent voice on sensitive issues and provide an invaluable contribution to contemporary debates on science, technology and art. The Antenna Gallery at the Science Museum enables visitors to reach their own conclusions about issues such as MMR and genetic engineering. Tate, through the Turner Prize, raises awareness and fosters debate around the questions of art and innovation.
- As highlighted in *National Dimensions*, through partnerships and collaborations across the UK, support for Renaissance in the Regions (and, in Scotland, the *Action Framework for Museums*) and relationships with regional development agencies, they contribute to Government's regional agenda, transforming nationwide access to our national collections. They are central to the creation of local community networks and the generation of civic, community and national pride and good citizenship.
- This access is provided through an enormous range of activities, not least the 101 travelling exhibitions that have toured over the last 3 years and the 30 strategic partnerships national museums currently have running with their regional counterparts.



- Internationally these institutions lead the world in many of their fields and contribute enormously to the UK's standing through both their positive profile raising and their cultural diplomacy. An obvious recent example of this is the British Museum's work in Iraq but there are many others including Tate and the V&A's recent work in Iran and the British Library's in Egypt, Korea and Iran.
- As the LSE team has shown, these institutions demonstrate astonishing creativity and innovative capacity and through an array of programmes and practice act as leading agents in the broader move towards social and ethnic inclusion. Through initiatives such as the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television's Youth TV Project and Tate's Karrot fashion project they make a real impact on real lives.
- NMDC museums, libraries and archives act as catalysts for individual creativity and inspiration, from the V&A's unique ability to inspire the world of fashion, to the Imperial War Museum's volunteer programme which, in conjunction with Salford College, provides vocational and practical experience to volunteers, enabling them to re-enter the jobs market in the North West.
- As important resources for industry, these institutions make key technological and scientific contributions. The National Gallery's work on digital imaging with Hewlett Packard and Tate's work on transport technology, since utilised in many other sectors, are good examples, while 90% of the UK's highest spending R&D companies source from the British Library.
- The Natural History Museum's medical and environmental research contributes uniquely to issues of a global scale. Their biomedical sciences group is a world leader in research into diseases such as river blindness, malaria, schistosomiasis and leishmaniasis.

Queues in Central Hall, Natural History Museum



© NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

The reports show extensive and impressive achievements and demonstrate that they are synchronised with government agendas across Whitehall. However they also emphasise that this is against a background of widening scales of demands on institutions (the multi-million attendance totals, pressures for international competitiveness and wider social objectives) which have come, for most of them, with funding that is rising only at the rate of retail price inflation and where the capacity to raise additional resources is limited.

Specifically:

- Between 1997-98 and 2003-04, Grant-in-Aid to major NMDC institutions generally increased no faster than the retail price index (and in some instances lagged significantly behind it) – just under 19 per cent – while average earnings surged by 34 per cent and overall UK public expenditure by 41 per cent
- Looking ahead to the period 2003-04 to 2005-06, larger NMDC museums and galleries will receive grant increases of 5.2 per cent, while Government as a whole pushes up its spending by 13.9 per cent.

For all the national museums and galleries, Grant-in-Aid (including compensation for free admission) has failed to grow commensurately with their extended audiences and increased activity levels.

One result of this pressure is that leading UK institutions are losing expertise, compared with their equivalent institutions in the United States, France and Germany.

The question inevitably begged, therefore, is: how far can NMDC members continue to deliver effectively against a background of static or falling real terms support from Government?

The Need

To sustain their impact, discharge their responsibilities for their collections and maintain existing levels of contribution to government policies, the national museums and galleries need an additional £50m per annum on top of inflation over the next five years.

Of that sum, £10m is required to continue extending access to the collections through a combination of digitisation projects, learning centres and enhanced regional programmes.

A further £10m is required for modernisation. This includes the updating of permanent exhibitions, collections care and conservation facilities to ensure the institutions retain their relevance and status as pre-eminent visitor attractions. Investment is also essential to improving efficiency in delivery, enabling staff restructuring and IT improvement.

The remaining £30m is required to address the backlog of property repair and maintenance work. This is currently estimated at £150m sector-wide and includes safety and public health requirements.

Without this investment in their core, the ability of the national museums and galleries to carry out their statutory obligations and sustain existing (let alone deliver on increased) levels of contribution to government agendas is put at risk and, potentially fatally impaired. As Tony Travers has demonstrated, if the present pattern of funding were to continue for more than another year or two, it will become imperative for NMDC institutions to start to prepare for an orderly management of decline and possibly plan, among other options, to cut back on galleries or access to exhibits and public services.

And the national museums, libraries and archives are not being required to (and do not want to) simply sustain existing levels of contribution; they are being required to expand them. The additional investment in their core is therefore needed if they are to be in a position to extend, by many tens of thousands, the numbers benefiting from their nationwide outreach programmes. It is required if they are to provide greater real and virtual access to their collections and expertise through digitised collections and better on-site learning centres. And it is required in order to extend their regional programmes and activities, often of greatest benefit to those at risk of social exclusion, thereby again delivering on key government objectives.

With nationals thus adequately resourced they will also be seeking, together with the rest of the sector, further additional funding to finance and build on collaborative activities with their regional counterparts which will begin to unlock the sector's potential to deliver ever more fully into Government's key education, social inclusion, regional and regeneration agendas across the whole nation.

The sector has already demonstrated just how effective and efficient it is at delivery when provided with the funding. Results have been disproportionately beneficial and the institutions merit sustained support so that government policies can be delivered alongside statutory outcomes.

Such an outcome is wholly consistent with both the interests of these institutions and the delivery of stated government policy and provides an opportunity to fulfil these shared agendas that should not be passed up.

The Research



Valuing Museums

Written by Tony Travers of LSE and Stephen Glaister of Imperial College, this report details the economic, educational and broader cultural impact of the national museums and galleries. Set out against the context of the wider objectives of these institutions, government policy and funding requirements, the report finds a sector which has unique international scale and standing and that, with an annual impact of £2bn, is significant economically.

Creative Engagement



This report written by Ricky Burdett of the LSE Cities Programme, demonstrates the extent, variety and often-surprising nature of the roles undertaken by national museums and galleries. Largely based on case studies, it illustrates how these institutions engage in a huge range of innovative activities with different communities across the UK, from Business and Science to Youth and Fashion. In doing so, the report highlights the ability of museums and galleries to inspire and empower individuals and groups, to create social capital and networks that, in turn, stimulate dialogue.

Again, set against a background of Government's policy objectives the report demonstrates just how significantly museums and galleries contribute to these.

National Dimensions



National Dimensions, written by AEA Consulting, examines the many forms of collaboration between national museums and the rest of the sector, noting just how much joint activity is underway at any one time. Produced following a series of consultation days around the country, the report looks at different types of collaborations, from one-off projects to long-term strategic partnerships, and includes a wealth of case studies covering all major areas of museum activity.

Looking ahead, the report acknowledges the need to continue to develop genuinely nationwide access to the national collections and sets out a series of proposals aimed at ensuring this, thereby supporting cultural provision, the advancement of learning and social and economic regeneration across the nation.

All three reports can be downloaded from our website at:

www.nationalmuseums.org.uk

Printed copies are also available from the NMDC Secretariat.