

Museums Matter

Culture

Local and national government policy is that museums should practice excellent standards of museum management, engage the widest possible public with their collections, be sustainably run, and ensure the highest standards of collections care and curation so that future generations can realise the benefits of museums as people today do.

ACCESSIBLE

Central government, the devolved administrations and many local authorities seek to reduce the barriers to accessing permanent collections by operating a free admission policy. Free admission reinforces the public ownership of many museum collections: collections owned by the state, paid for in part by general or local taxation and created, in many cases over a period of more than a century, by public benefaction through the donation of objects or money for new acquisitions. The public is able to make the distinction between freely accessible public collections and charges for temporary exhibitions or sites where visitors are less likely to visit repeatedly. Similarly, it draws a distinction for the public between civic and independent museums (where the collection is owned by a charitable trust) and allows the latter to generate income through admission – although museums that charge for entry frequently operate annual tickets and also enjoy repeat visits.

POPULAR

Museums have never been so popular. Visits to the Natural History Museum have more than tripled since 2000/01 to 5,578,580 in 2013/14, and there has been a fivefold increase in visits to Royal Museums Greenwich to 2,488,801.¹ Museums have also turned the regions into must-visit destinations: around 18,000 visitors attended the re-opening weekend of The Whitworth at the University of Manchester; visits to museums in Oxford have doubled to 2 million in the last five years²; and 85% of local and 57% of holiday visitors to Penlee House Gallery and Museum in Penzance are repeat visitors.

EXCELLENT

The excellence of museums' public programming is demonstrated by their critically acclaimed and record-breaking popular temporary exhibitions. This success is based on two factors: the outstanding reputation of UK museums which enables them to borrow from institutions and private collections across the world; and the expertise of museum staff to curate and present material in an accessible way. Museums of all sizes and types regularly work in

partnership to deliver collaborative projects with other museums, educational establishments, and heritage and community organisations. Partnerships focus on developing new public programming, education and learning, the exchange of skills and expertise and working with communities, enabling benefits to be shared with the widest possible audience.

Museums loan thousands of objects to other museums across the UK every year as part of mutually beneficial collaborative projects. In 2013/14, DCMS-sponsored museums lent objects to 1,657 venues around the UK. The famously over-stuffed Horniman Walrus left the museum for the first time in 112 years in 2013 to be part of the Hayward Gallery's *Curiosity* exhibition at the Turner Contemporary in Margate where it was seen by 136,000 visitors. The Great Bed of Ware went on a year-long loan from the V&A to Ware Museum where it almost tripled Ware's annual visitor numbers. All but one of the locomotives and stock on display at STEAM in Swindon is on long-term loan from the National Railway Museum.

INNOVATIVE

Museums have embraced new digital and technological innovations, allowing greater public engagement. The British Museum had 6.7 million visitors in 2014 and connected with 43.7 million virtually.³ As part of Imperial War Museums' First World War commemorations, 7.6 million stories have been added by the public to the *Lives of the First World War* website. *Orchid Observers* is one of the Natural History Museum's many Citizen Science projects, and requires the public to photograph any wild orchid they see and upload the photograph and their observations. The National Gallery's *Rembrandt: Late Works* exhibition was one of many exhibitions made accessible to those who are unable to travel to London by providing exhibition screenings at cinemas across the UK.

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¹ DCMS Sponsored Museums and Galleries KPIs

² <http://www.museums.ox.ac.uk/drupal7/content/facts-and-figures>

³ http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/press_releases/2015/annual_review_2015.aspx