

Museums Matter

Education

Children's formal education continuously adapts to prepare them for a quickly changing world. In recent years the school curriculum has changed to include updated computer science, a broader span of history and non-European languages. Education is more than just the formal curriculum and schools and families seek inspiring experiences for young people to help raise aspiration, make learning memorable and equip them with the skills and curiosity for adulthood. UK universities attract under- and post-graduate students from across the world and provide some of the best and most varied tertiary education available. The benefits of lifelong learning – in both formal and informal environments – are well documented, contributing to health and happiness and increased earning potential.

SCHOOLS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In each week, 4% of the child population in England visits a museum.¹ The nature of museums' collections allows them to support the teaching of a number of subjects across the school curriculum through visits to museums, digital resources, collaborative projects or object handling boxes sent to schools.

Object-based teaching enriches the curriculum and adds a dimension to understanding and learning which cannot be achieved by classroom teaching alone. Research shows that 95% of teachers feel their pupils are inspired to learn more after visiting a museum; 88% would explore new ideas with their pupils as a consequence; and 94% thought pupils would improve subject-related understanding.² Visiting museums in childhood is associated with better qualifications and employment in later life. In the 2014 Scottish Household Survey, 41% of those with degrees or professional qualifications reported visiting museums and galleries during childhood, compared with 20% of those with no qualifications.³

Museum education has been revolutionised over the past 20 years, from a "look and don't touch" approach to providing inspirational and immersive experiences such as *Against Captain's Orders* at the Royal Museums Greenwich. This interactive theatrical experience was developed with the theatre company Punchdrunk. Aimed at 6-12 year olds, with their families and in school groups, it allowed children to be active participants in a journey through the Museum's collections.

There is also an increasingly greater role for museum educators in teacher and learning assistant training and in the provision of classroom resources. The British Museum, working with museums across the

UK, developed *Teaching History in 100 Objects* to support the History curriculum. Leeds Museums and Galleries runs a digital learning tool for teachers, *My Learning*, which covers the breadth of the school curriculum and includes 300 resources from 230 museums and archives.

LIFELONG LEARNING

Museums provide teaching and learning experiences at many different life stages. Museum staff teach on Higher Education courses and provide free or affordable access to university-level learning by working with universities on the development of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Museums provide vocational training for local businesses and run hundreds of adult learning courses, as shown by Glasgow Museums' dedicated online adult learning resource. Museums are a less intimidating environment in which to learn and objects make learning easier: basic adult literacy is taught through *English at the Museum* at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in partnership with Exeter College, and the Museum has taken objects into Exeter and Dartmoor prisons for their Brain Gym sessions.

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¹ DCMS Taking Part Survey 2014/15 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201415-annual-child-release>

² *What did you learn at the museum today?*, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at University of Leicester, 2005, p.12.

³ Scotland's People Annual Report: Results from 2013 Scottish Household Survey <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/08/7973/13>