

NMDC response to the DCMS Civil Society Strategy Engagement Exercise

May 2018

1.1 The National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC) represents the leaders of the UK's national collections and major regional museums. Our members are the national and major regional museums in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Archives and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. NMDC acts as an advocate on behalf of members and their collective priorities and provides them with a valuable forum for discussion and debate and an opportunity to share information and work collaboratively. While our members are funded by government, the NMDC is an independent, non-governmental organisation. For more information about NMDC and our activity see our website: www.nationalmuseums.org.uk

1.2 NMDC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Civil Society Strategy. This response relates to the role museums play in supporting civil society priorities and as a partner in delivering joint projects. As such, comments relate to the sections in the consultation on People, Partnership, Youth Provision, Place, and Public Services with examples of museum support for civil society. The response also builds on evidence submitted to the APPG for Arts, Health and Wellbeing and Select Committee Inquiries into the Social Impact of Art and Sport and 'Countries of Culture', all of which have sought to understand better the positive impact museums have on society.

1.3 Museums play an important role in civil society, making a significant contribution to the creation of peaceful and prosperous communities and an environment for people to be healthier and happier. Museums are able to have this impact and thus create the means to improve health and well-being by utilising the unique assets of their buildings, collections and staff expertise.

1.4 People stay healthy through social connection and reduce pressure on health services if they feel welcome in a civic institution or are able to make a positive contribution to their community. A museum building is a sociable and egalitarian place open to people of all ages and backgrounds. The act of visiting museums has a positive impact on health and well-being – they are warm and welcoming, safe and trusted spaces (and in many cases free of charge to visit). The objects in museum collections, interpreted by skilled staff, can stimulate memories, help people make sense of a confusing world, provide joy and inspiration and the start for a conversation. These have been shown to positively affect mood, self-worth and general sense of well-being.¹

1.5 Museums also work in partnership with specialist organisations such as charities, care providers and community groups to devise specific projects and programmes to draw people back into society and improve their mental and physical health. Museum health and well-being projects deliver demonstrable benefits including improving mental health, public health, and tackling isolation and alienation. A recent Museums Association survey² found that 74% of museums in the UK work directly with local community groups, more than half work with youth groups (55%) and large percentages work with health and wellbeing providers (46%) and disability groups (47%). Smaller but significant proportions of respondents

¹ *Arts, Health and Wellbeing Beyond the Millennium: how far have we come and where do we want to go?*, a report by the RSPH Working Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, June 2013, p.53

² <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1244881>

said they had worked with black, Asian and ethnic minority communities (23%), environmental groups or campaigns (18%), LGBTQ+ groups (19%), refugees or asylum seekers (15%) and gender equality groups (12%).

1.6 Museums across the sector also work with a large number of volunteers, the same survey reported that the average number of volunteers for a museum (including Trustees as voluntary appointments) in 2016/17 was 46. The survey reported that 39% of respondents had seen an increase in volunteers working in their museum from the previous year.

1.7 In order to continue to play a key role in building and supporting civil society it is vital that museums receive adequate investment and support by national and local government across the country. The following case studies outline how museums support civil society in the categories identified by the consultation.

People

Museums can play a key role in developing skills, empowering communities or improving individual health and well-being.

2.1 The Imperial War Museum's Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for wellbeing (2013-2017) provided longitudinal evidence that museums and galleries are highly effective settings for supporting local services through "social prescribing" to improve peoples' wellbeing and health recovery. From October 2013 – June 2017, IWM North and Manchester Museum delivered a volunteering, training and placement programme across 10 heritage venues in Greater Manchester to collectively achieve improvements, consistency and quality in volunteering practice as a key route to transforming wellbeing. Over 230 people were recruited, 75% of people were in receipt of a benefit, many of whom were long-term unemployed, isolated and struggling with poor mental health. IWM's heritage venues provided a stimulating and reflective environment to support social isolation and wellbeing inequalities. It helped people from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds to believe in themselves, increase their confidence and most importantly helped people realise their full potential to take that next step in supporting their own wellbeing. Over 75 % of participants reported a significant increase in wellbeing after 1 year, 30% found employment or new opportunities for getting into work.^[1] The findings show that the project has generated social and economic value of approximately £2 million across the three years. Projects like this could alleviate resource pressures on local health care and support services. At the same time the project has changed perceptions about galleries and museums as assets for recuperation and improving health.

2.2 The five Museums of the Science Museum Group (SMG) attract 5.5 million visits per year, and over 600,000 visits in education groups. With this considerable reach SMG plays a central and irreplaceable role in deepening and expanding science literacy in the UK. Its organising principle is to build 'science capital'³ to enrich people's lives and enhance their contributions to society and its core number one priority in its 2017-2030 Strategy⁴ is 'to grow science capital in individuals and society'. It aims to provide experiences that help more people make deeper connections with science by accessing the 'capital' they already have, to help change attitudes towards science in the long term. SMG is a trusted, authoritative organisation and is well-placed to bridge the gaps between science practitioners, policy-makers and the public, leading to better research and a more informed and engaged populace. This is just one example of how museums help us become better informed citizens

³ The concept of science capital (science-related qualifications, interest, literacy and social contacts) helps us to understand how young people from all backgrounds engage with science and how their engagement might be supported

⁴ Inspiring Futures Strategic Priorities 2017-2030 <https://group.sciencemuseum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Inspiring-Futures-Strategic-Priorities-2017-2030.pdf>

with a stake in society and better equipped to engage with the big issues that face us at individual, community, national and global level.

Partnership

Museums work in partnership with a range of organisations to deliver benefits of all kinds from health and well-being, youth projects, programmes for early years and young children and those experiencing a range of disadvantage.

3.1 By working in partnership with specialist organisations such as charities, care providers and community groups museums are able to use their collections and devise specific programmes to draw people back into society and tackle loneliness and isolation. The significant impact of this work – using comparatively small amounts of public funding to make a major difference to the lives of vulnerable people – should be championed and supported by DCMS and the Department of Health. For example, National Museums Liverpool receives funding from local Health Trusts and Care Commissioning Groups⁵ to run the award-winning *House of Memories*, which targets carers and health and social care providers and helps them to deliver a positive quality of life experience for people living with dementia. House of Memories provides health, social care and housing professionals and family carers with a training programme to increase dementia awareness and understanding based on the museum's collection and role at the heart of the city's life. To date more than 11,000 people have undertaken the training. The programme demonstrates how a museum can provide the health and social care sector with practical skills and knowledge to facilitate access to untapped cultural resources, often within their locality.

3.2 The National Portrait Gallery has been working in partnership with children's hospitals in London for over 15 years, sharing inspirational stories of men and women in the Collection and providing access to free, high quality arts activities. Playful Portraits is the new iteration of a programme developed to provide creative arts activity for young people in children's hospitals. Partnering with Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, Evelina London Children's Hospital at St Thomas', The Royal London Hospital at Whitechapel and Newham University Hospital the Gallery provides much needed arts activity during school holidays when the hospital school is shut and activity for young people is limited. These programmes deliver physical, cognitive, social and emotional benefits to patients, a positive creative experience for families and a motivating opportunity for hospital staff to collaborate with the Gallery team to deliver benefits to patients.

3.3 The project Cornish Gig Project at the National Maritime Museum in Cornwall concentrated on teaching new skills and abilities to Forces personnel trying to adapt to civilian life after exposure to hugely stressful situations during their time in the military, while at the same time instilling a sense of pride and worth in the participants, which would bolster their self-confidence and encourage them to deal with the difficulties they faced. It was felt that the construction of a pilot gig would deliver these goals and would also demonstrate that the popular sport of gig racing can be open to a wide range of disabled athletes. Approximately 40 Wounded in Service participants, selected with guidance from Help for Heroes, benefitted from the project, their ages ranging from early 20s to mid-50s. One participant described the project as life changing and signed up to a boat building course as a direct result. In April 2016 the boat was presented to Help for Heroes on the Isles of Scilly, in time to take part in the World Pilot Gig Championships, following an "Epic Row" by some of the participants from Falmouth to Scilly. The pilot gig, having been donated to Help for Heroes, is now based at the charity's Plymouth Centre and is regularly used for recreational and competitive purposes by WIS Armed Forces personnel and Veterans.

3.4 To have more impact and provide greater benefits to the communities they serve, successful museum partnerships like these rely on well supported and resourced partners. DCMS' continued championing of civil society organisations is therefore essential to ensure

⁵ <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learning/projects/house-of-memories/>

that more areas of society are able to benefit from partnerships that have museum collections at their core.

Youth Provision

Museums provide a space for young people to learn, share experiences, gain knowledge and understanding about societal issues, gain confidence and discover a wide range of opportunities for further study and future careers.

4.1 The Science and Heritage Career Ladder (SHCL) is a sustainable and structured employment-based training programme run by Birmingham's Thinktank. Its aims are to provide employment for young people, structured training and raise awareness of science, technology and heritage-based careers. Since 2008, 61 16 – 17-year olds have taken part. Thinktank's inspiration came from a need to make the museum more inviting and relevant to the diverse communities in its immediate vicinity. The community need was the provision of paid job and training opportunities for young people, in an inner-city area of high deprivation and worklessness. By recruiting young people from its immediate local areas, Thinktank's staff has become more representative of Birmingham's communities in terms of ethnic and socio-economic diversity, and has helped establish better links with new audiences. The programme also directly supports a number of national, regional themes: diversifying the museum workforce by addressing the underrepresentation of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and people from socio-economic C2DE in science communication and museum workforces; the stagnation in numbers of young people choosing science to meet the pace of job creation; and participation in a programme of evaluation to examine the role of youth educators as learners and teachers in informal science learning sites, including including the impact of our career ladder programme on young people's higher education paths and career decisions.

4.2 Norfolk Museums Service 'Into Museums Pass' is an initiative to enable some of Norfolk's most vulnerable people to access collections for free – the pass is for anyone aged 16-21 who is unwaged, temporarily housed, homeless or in supervised lodgings.

4.3 Tate, with agreement from Government is currently seeking to appoint its first young 'Trustee for a New Generation'. Having consulted with 16-25 year olds, the new Trustee would be a voice dedicated to bringing the next generation to the highest level of Tate's decision-making. Tate has also just launched £5 exhibition tickets for the same age group to ensure that young people have fair access to the collection. Both projects are the legacy of Tate's four-year 'Circuit' programme which engaged 175,000 people under 25 in England and Wales.

Place

5.1 The contribution that museums make to place-making was recognised in the recent Mendoza Review of museums in England. Museums are rooted locally and provide a sense of place through their activities both within and outside the museum building. They foster curiosity and creativity and create a local environment which helps attract and retain workers, and are a significant contributor to what makes a place attractive to live in, work in, visit or invest in.

5.2 Museums play a key role in developing people's sense of place and pride in where they live. Museums help foster a strong sense of community – understanding difference and sharing commonalities – by participation in civil society to celebrate, commemorate or help in times of crisis. Few other civic institutions have the public trust, collections or national network to mastermind large scale acts of remembrance, like the Centenary of the First World War, led by Imperial War Museums. Museums are also a safe, inclusive and egalitarian space for all members of the communities they serve and have a key part to play in promoting a tolerant, diverse and cohesive society.

5.3 *The Troubles and Beyond*, the new permanent exhibition at the Ulster Museum opened to coincide with the 20th Anniversary of The Good Friday Agreement, exploring politics and conflict and the impact of both on everyday life, people and communities. It powerfully examines our recent past through a remarkable range of objects reflecting diverse perspectives and experiences. Many objects have been contributed directly by the public as part of a major collecting initiative, *Collecting the Troubles and Beyond*, launched in 2016 and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project has helped to enhance the existing Ulster Museum Troubles collection, which dates back to the outbreak of the conflict, through an active programme of contemporary collecting, including community collecting events. The new gallery is rich in the range of objects, stories and material it presents, on display together for the first time. The new gallery seeks to move beyond a conventional political narrative and the Good Friday Agreement itself, and includes a section on 'post conflict' Northern Ireland with objects relating to flag protests, the campaign for equal marriage and Brexit. Images from celebrated local photographers Bill Kirk, Frankie Quinn and Martin Nangle are also on display, many of which capture the social and economic decay that was compounded by the Troubles. Their work also powerfully evokes the resilience of people living through difficult times.

5.4 Derby Museums have been working with local volunteers across a range of projects that put the city's heritage at their heart. For example, the museums have been co-producing the transcription of handwritten accounts of the Silk Mill from the 1740s with volunteers, using the information contained within to challenge the established story of the famous mill. A previously unprovenanced object that was identified and given meaning by a local first-time visitor – illustrating the move away from exclusively academic or curator-imposed significance and guardianship of collections, as the museums open up access to 100% of their collections in the new Museum of Making. Derby have the skills in house to create ultra-HD 3D scans of their collections in order to share them around the world, such as the Rolls-Royce Eagle engine that flew the world's first non-stop Trans-Atlantic flight in 1919, the museum co-produces their 3D scans with volunteers of all ages and backgrounds, training people in cutting-edge technology relevant to industries in the city.

5.5 There are many examples of both formal and informal partnerships between museums across a geographical location. The Humber Museums Partnership was formed in 2014 for a project called 'Joining Up The Humber' and was a huge success – the Partnership was then awarded Major Partner Museum status in 2015 by Arts Council England and its members now work together on a series of joint projects. The partnership comprises of Hull, North Lincolnshire and East Riding Museums services working closely together to celebrate and share local heritage. Working collaboratively allows for the sharing of ideas and shared topics exploiting historical links between sites, shared resource, shared projects and exhibitions, all of which enhance and enrich the visitor experience. City devolution and the introduction of combined authorities presents the opportunity to realise the sorts of economies of scale and strategic planning long enjoyed by the Norfolk Museums Service (a collaboration between district councils and county councils) and the neighbouring Colchester and Ipswich Museum Services. The opportunity presented by city devolution is to place museums at the heart of city-wide planning and demonstrate how they are delivering the priorities for the city.

5.6 Given how large a part museums play in local placemaking, it is frustrating that there is so little representation of museums on the boards of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and so few examples of where culture has been prioritised and thus benefited from the work and resources of LEPs. We therefore believe that museums should be fully represented in LEPs and culture should be fully integrated into town or regional economic plans – such as the newly devolved city regions in England – to enable museums to play an important role in local development and place-making.

Public services

6.1 Museums of all kinds – whether funded by national governments, operating as part of a local authority service or as an independent trust - deliver on a range of key public policy

priorities, including health and well-being, raising aspirations, and the development of peaceful and prosperous communities.

6.2 Museums are safe and social spaces: warm and welcoming to the whole community. A museum that is fully embedded within its community means that no-one feels the museum “is not for them”. Fostering a sense of community – understanding differences and sharing commonalities – is a powerful way of encouraging civic engagement and participation in civil society to celebrate, commemorate or help in times of crisis. Museums tell local, national and international stories, giving a sense of shared heritage and fostering a sense of common identity for a place. For example, Birmingham Museums Trust has used ACE funding to develop its ‘Faith in Birmingham’ Gallery through engagement with local interfaith leaders and volunteers, responding to audience research which highlighted that museums should be safe spaces in which people can share and explore their differences to each other.

6.3 Strategic funds to support partnership working across government agencies and local authorities in order to deliver on specific policy goals (such as the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia) would be an effective and targeted use of public investment. DCMS should work with museums to promote the significant impact museums can have on these priorities to relevant Government departments (including Health, Communities and Local Government, Ministry of Defence, Education) and help identify sources of support. The DCMS/DfE Strategic Commissioning model to invest in museum education programmes could be replicated across other public policy priorities. This sort of finance is important to museums which by nature have high fixed costs and budgets for caring for collections, thus making it difficult to find capacity to begin this sort of work. It is also important that museums and the wider culture sector should be given due consideration in health and wellbeing planning, including through local authorities' Joint Strategic Needs Assessments. There is still scope for greater information sharing amongst services about how the cultural sector can work more effectively with NHS and local authority services.

6.4 In the context of local and central government spending the amount allocated to museums is very small. Cutting this will only have minimal bearing on deficit reduction, but the value of what will be lost will be much greater. In order for museums to continue to deliver these benefits for civil society, the sector must receive adequate investment to support a wide range of policy objectives.

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