

Section 1: A Vision for Museum Education

Our vision for the new Millennium is of museums inspiring and supporting a learning society as they reach out to the widest possible range of audiences.

England is extremely fortunate in having more than 2,000 museums in cities, towns and villages across the country, a rich resource that is an indication of the breadth, diversity and vitality of our cultural landscape. With collections and exhibitions of outstanding quality covering an extraordinary range of subjects, our museums have a unique capacity to provide us with opportunities for appreciation, reflection and learning. The special circumstance of learning in the presence of real objects inspires curiosity and creative thinking, and gives museums the potential to develop distinctive and meaningful educational experiences.

The Government believes that education is central to the role of museums today and recognises that many museums are already providing learners with an excellent service, sometimes on limited resources. This document applauds the museums that are fostering what the Prime Minister has called 'the learning habit' and aims to encourage others and those in the wider world of education to work together for the broader educational benefit of the communities they serve.

There are numerous examples of museums that are developing innovative learning activities and the case studies in this document describe some inspirational examples of good practice. They demonstrate how, through their education programmes, museums can help to realise the common objectives of the DfEE and the DCMS in promoting social inclusion, fostering

Case Study: 2000 & Counting in

Through its Museums and Galleries Education Programme, the DfEE is supporting 63 initiatives that are promoting better links between museums and schools. The 2000 & Counting project run by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council is led by the Education Department and the Council's Arts and Heritage Service, which consists of the Art Gallery, Local Studies/Archive Service and the Museum Service. The Museum Service has no education staff at present and is run on an outreach and appointment basis, although it operates an extremely successful loans box scheme and school visits to the Local Studies Library and Gallery are actively encouraged. The project is initially targeting the three schools in Rochdale with the greatest need.

This project represents the first step in formulating strategies to address this gap in provision and aims to motivate and enable teachers to use the collections effectively both in the classroom and on visits to the Arts & Heritage Centre outside school hours. Didsbury School of Education and Rochdale Borough Chamber are also involved in the training side of the project and the partnership approach is a crucial element of the project. With no dedicated gallery or museum education service, advocacy and motivation are the key issues in enabling the collections to be used for teaching.

2000 & Counting is an imaginative response to the National Numeracy Strategy in primary education and demonstrates how collections can be used for teaching across the curriculum, not just in history and art. The activities planned as part of the project include: compiling resource packs and loans boxes for

creativity and developing the aptitudes, aspirations and abilities of children and adults.

Many of the case studies also show the imaginative and hands-on activities now undertaken in museums. These activities have immense value in enthusing and motivating those taking part and promoting their self-confidence, knowledge and skills. In doing so, museums demonstrate how they can meet many of the themes described in the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (*All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*). Increasingly, the workplace requires people to think creatively, to apply creative thinking to complex management and technical problems, and we need to provide the talent base for our creative industries – the media, the performing arts, film and design. Museums are themselves centres of creativity

whose collections and exhibitions are often designed by staff trained in one of the creative industries and whose talents then inspire others working in the creative sphere or who aspire to join.

New types of organisation are evolving to develop the potential of learning in museums. Science centres, children's museums and other such innovatory bodies that are attracting new audiences with creative and novel means of communication have inspired thousands of visitors to consider thought-provoking concepts and knowledge. The Government sees a close parallel between the educational impact of these new centres and traditional museums.

The power of museums to inspire learners can operate in many different educational contexts. For example, museums can:

Rochdale

use in the classroom, INSET courses in numeracy and methods of learning from objects, maths assemblies in schools, a family numeracy programme, displays in the Art Gallery and Local Studies Library, maths and activity days at the Arts and Heritage Centre for all schools in the borough. The programme demonstrates the strategic approach of the project, which has, partly through necessity, had to look beyond traditional ways of delivering museum and gallery education.

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- enhance delivery of the National Curriculum by providing new and varied ways of developing literacy, numeracy, PSHE and other subjects;
- make available a rich storehouse of unique objects and interpretative materials that can bring classroom teaching to life;
- offer opportunities for children to learn about their local communities and assist schools in their responsibility to deliver Citizenship from 2002;
- set up innovative and exciting activities for children in particular subjects to develop key skills such as communication and team-working, and foster their creative abilities;
- provide a study resource for students in formal education and adults with special interests engaged in independent learning;
- encourage adults who find formal education intimidating to take the first step on a learning journey;
- give families and individuals an opportunity to take part in informal learning activities in a relaxed environment;
- appeal to previously excluded sectors of society and under-motivated pupils or adult learners through exciting, open-ended learning situations;
- reach out into communities to develop new services and audiences.



Case Study:

In 1997 a local studies group from Benwell in Newcastle visited the Museum of Antiquities. The group was amazed to discover that Benwell had once been an important and cosmopolitan place and that a large number of significant artefacts had survived as evidence of this. As one of them said, 'Benwell really was once the Centre of the Universe.' Inspired by their visitor, the museum staff determined to make the past glories of Benwell more widely known.

The museum decided that it would build on its expertise with the Internet and work with

However, at present the provision of educational services by museums is patchy, ranging from the outstanding to the mediocre. There is no apparent justification for this arbitrary pattern of distribution. Good provision enables teachers to use cultural resources to enrich the curriculum. Sadly, museum education, where it is provided, is too often seen by teachers as an optional extra and is not integrated into the wider learning process. However, there is a will to do more and to do better. Within the world of education, as well as that of museums, there is a strong desire for museums to play a key part in the learning society of this new century.

Harnessing the capacity of museums to enhance learning means developing relevant and interesting programmes that will attract audiences from both the formal educational community and the public at large.

To do this effectively and fully means putting education at the heart of every museum, whatever its size, origin and ethos. This will inevitably have a significant impact on museums' outlook, priorities, planning, presentation and facilities. All these need to reflect the importance of learning, and education needs to feature prominently in mission statements, strategies and forward plans. Stewardship, care and access will continue to be priorities for museums, but this does not mean a choice can be made between stewardship and education. The goal must be stewardship in order to enable present and future generations to appreciate and learn from the objects in museums' care.

The Government has pledged to raise educational standards across the board. The DCMS includes among its objectives the development of the educational

Benwell – Centre of the Universe

local schoolchildren to develop a web exhibition. Children in Class 7H1 from Westgate Community College in Benwell were asked to choose objects for the exhibition and write about their reasons for picking them. They then developed their ICT skills by preparing material about the objects they had chosen for display on the Internet. Three councillors from Newcastle City Council who had been involved from the start wrote an introduction that put the exhibition in its social context. The museum staff produced the final display and, in association with the County Archaeologist, added further information about the sites and objects.

The project has produced a resource that not only is a teaching aid for present and future schoolchildren of the locality, but also brings the history of a small suburb to the attention of a much wider audience. All

the participants gained a sense of connection with the history of their area, and were introduced to ways in which a museum collection can bring the past to life.

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The Benwell Centre of the Universe site is accessible through the Museum of Antiquities website <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/antiquities/>



potential of the nation's cultural and sporting resources; educational objectives already feature strongly in the funding agreements between DCMS and the museums it directly sponsors. The DfEE aims to ensure that all young people develop the skills, attitudes and personal qualities that will give them a secure foundation in a rapidly changing world; it also wishes to enable people from all age-groups to continue learning in order that they may enhance their lives, contribute to society, improve their employability and develop the skills the economy needs.

With these goals in mind, the Government wants to see every museum give a high priority to their educational work. It believes that all museums, whatever their size and type, can become centres for learning and powerful educational resources. Small museums as well as large ones can and should work

with existing and potential audiences to identify their interests and prepare appropriate activities. The challenge is to ensure that this engagement takes place so that the learning potential of all museums can be enjoyed by the audiences they serve.

For change to be achieved, museums themselves must share this vision. The education sector too needs to play its part by recognising the unique dimension that museums can bring to the experience of learning. Teachers and others in the world of education can help museums shape educational programmes so that they become outward-looking and inclusive centres of knowledge. Realising this vision requires action and initiatives to focus on seven key areas:

objectives –

museums need to embrace education as a core objective in the development of mission

statements, policies and action plans; similar formal recognition of the unique educational role of museums must be reflected in the educational community's policies, plans and mission statements;

standards –

universal standards for the delivery of education services need to be adopted;

partnerships –

museums and users should explore and exploit the benefits of working together;

resources and capability –

core resources should be allocated and prioritised according to capability and demand by museums and educational concerns in order to maintain and develop services;

training –

appropriate training should be provided for those entering the museum and education professions and for those already established in their professions;

information and communication technology –

the vital role that technology can play in enhancing gallery displays, providing remote access, developing new high-quality digitised material and building networks must be exploited; and

research –

evidence of the exciting work already happening needs to be collated and areas where education provision requires development should be identified.

An overview of current activity is given in Section 2 of this document, and a more detailed discussion on each of these seven areas is set out in Section 3.

