Evaluation of the West Midlands Museum Development Programme 2018-19

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SUPPORTED BY



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This is the fourth independent evaluation carried out by Wootton George Consulting, and was undertaken using a range of internal monitoring materials and a number of semi-structured interviews with staff and representatives from museums participating in the programme.

Foreword

The West Midlands Museum Development programme, now in its fourth year, continues to be delivered by Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and funded by Arts Council England. Through grants, free training and projects the programme supports Accredited museums and those Working Towards Accreditation across the wider West Midlands region to develop, thrive and reflect the rich diversity and cultural heritage of the region.

I am delighted to share the findings of an external evaluation of the first year of the 2018-22 contract, a year of change and review for the sector with more museums than ever receiving direct ACE funding through the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) programme; the introduction of National Lottery Project Grants; and launch of the newly refreshed Museum Accreditation scheme.

We look forward to stimulating new ideas, providing continued support and vital challenge in collaboration with other NPO and Sector Support Organisations, museum colleagues and organisations from outside the sector.

Karen Davies

Director of Development Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

Executive Summary

The first three years of delivery (2015-18) was a great success, with new and innovative approaches taken, including bringing in expertise from outside the sector. Over the three years these approaches were built on, with the programme gaining impressive reach and feedback from museums indicating how highly valued the work is. The previous evaluation, which looked at the programme for 2015-18 identified that the challenge for the next four years would be to maintain momentum and to explore connections within the activities.

Overall this year has been strong with activity exceeding targets, and high levels of satisfaction with the programme. However, the programme should take the opportunity to review progress to date and look at reviewing delivery, with a focus on:

- ► Checking the programme meets the range of needs across the museum sector, appealing to and engaging all target museums
- Proactively working to continue to innovative within the programme
- Revisit marketing, from ensuring that people understand the objectives of the programme and range of support available, to how activities are marketed and people are encouraged to participate

West Midlands Museum Development Programme

The programme supports Accredited museums and those officially Working Towards Accreditation, based in Birmingham and the Black Country, Herefordshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, and Worcestershire. The work focuses on building capacity; resilience and skills and building a sector that inspires and engages diverse audiences.

The programme's vision is for the West Midlands Museum sector to develop, thrive and collaborate to ensure future sustainability through cross cultural programmes which excite and inspire diverse audiences and deliver a professional customer focussed visitor experience.

The programme has the following goals:

- ► Excellence: is thriving and celebrated
- Opportunity: everyone can experience and be inspired
- Resilience: museums become sustainable through innovative and entrepreneurial ways of working
- ► Leadership: the workforce is diverse and suitably skilled
- Young People: encouraging the next generation to be excited and enriched by museums

The programme is delivered over five strands of work:

- Audiences
- ▶ Collections
- ► Workforce Development & Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Resilience
- Young People

The work directly supports the delivery of the UK Accreditation Scheme for museums and galleries in England.

Each strand has a lead within the WMMD team who designs the programme and commissions delivery partners to undertake the work.

This approach provides a range of opportunities for participation in schemes, training, grants, programmes and networks based on an informed understanding of the context and needs of museums in the West Midlands. The flexibility to commission specialists to deliver training and programmes provides the opportunity to draw on best practice from within and beyond the museum sector.

West Midlands Museum Sector

The number of museums being supported (Accredited and Working Towards) remains stable with 139 museums. This includes a mix of museum types and sizes, the majority of which are independent museums, followed by those run by Local Authorities, National Trust, Universities, English Heritage and national organisations. The museums include those operated by paid staff, paid and voluntary and entirely volunteer managed.

The Annual Museum Survey undertaken in 2018 highlights that:

- ▶ 34% of the museums were classed as small (9,999 and under visitors), 40% were medium (10,000-49,999 visitors), 13% were large (50,000-99,999 visitors), and 13% were extra-large (100,000 +)
- ► The gross visitor impact to the West Midlands economy was £42m+
- ► The total income generated by the museums responding was £59m+ of which: 52% was earned income, 27% was from the Arts Council, 7% was in grant income and the remaining 14% in donations, sponsorship etc.

Significant Changes

Museum Accreditation Scheme

- ► The scheme was relaunched in November 2018 following a two year review, with Accreditation standards simplified and less paperwork, which needs to be submitted every five years (rather than three)
- ► The changes have been welcomed by museums, and consequently more museums are Working Towards Accreditation, so interest in becoming Accredited is growing

Arts Council England

- ► In March 2018, ACE launched its Project Grants scheme which is now open to Accredited museums (including those with Provisional Accreditation)
- ► The Arts Council Creative Case for Diversity is a key consideration for both National Portfolio Organisations and those applying for Project Grants – museums increasingly need to address diversity issues for both ACE and other funding

National Lottery Heritage Fund

- ► The National Lottery Heritage Fund has a new strategic funding framework (2020-2025) which focusing on nature, communities and ensuring everyone is able to enjoy heritage
- ► The impact of this will be that there will be more competition, with less money available. In turn, museums will continue to need to secure or generate income from other sources

GDPR

▶ In May 2018 the General Data Protection Regulation came into force, which meant that the number of individual subscribers to the programme reduced. However, since that date the number is steadily increasing

National Museum Development Network

► This last year has seen closer working with the other eight museum development providers, with more strategic working to collect standardised information, identify training needs, track participation, commission training and projects, and measure impact.

Activity at a Glance

The West Midlands Museum Development programme has delivered a wide range of workshops, events and activities during the year.

During the year, the programme has supported 131 of 139 Accredited museums and those Working Towards Accreditation through:

- ▶ 43 events, reaching 560 attendees
- ▶ Eight programme projects for 30 museums
- ► Annual Museum Survey report
- Seven small grants of up to £3k
- West Midlands Volunteer Awards
- Annual Conference

The programme as a whole continues to have a strong impact, reaching a wide range of participants, and therefore the sector workforce. Recent data shows that from November 2018 to April 2019, 70% of participants were paid staff, 25% were volunteers and 5% freelance.

Accreditation

111 participants representing 76 museums:

- Banish the Backlog with Collections Trust collections documentation support plus three workshops
- ► Accreditation Mentor networking event
- ► Two 'Get the most from Accreditation' workshops
 - ► Audience Development in Action access planning and live streaming
 - ► Collections law, rationalisation and procedural manuals
- Governance and Constitution workshop
- 'Preparing for Emergencies' workshops delivered by Historic England and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service
 - ▶ Prevention and Protection
 - ► Creating an Emergency Plan

Audiences

64 participants representing 49 museums:

- Secret Museums Mystery Shopper with six museums, including a sharing workshop. Two age groups targeted young people and over 45s
- Introduction to Audience Development workshop with The Audience Agency
- Exceeding Visitor Expectations workshop
- Training based on findings from the Education Audit
 - ► Trust Fundraising Getting it Right
 - ► A Call to Adventure two workshops on delivering highly interactive, creative learning experiences
 - ► Effective Social Media and Newsletters
- Seven small grants totalling £20k awarded for audience development projects to support museums to increase their relevance to their local communities

Collections

97 participants representing 57 museums:

- Good Housekeeping
 - ▶ Stop the Rot
 - ► Handling and Packing
 - ► Emergency Planning
- Expert Eye provided curatorial expertise to two museums. One event opened to other museums
- ► Pilot project for digital support in setting up a geocaching trail in exhibition spaces for three museums
- ► Four Collections Knowledge Café workshops
 - Marking and Labelling held twice
 - ► Getting to Know Your Ceramic Collection
 - ► Care of Costume and Textiles
- ▶ Every Object Tells a Story: Developing Confidence in Talking about Our Collections

Resilience

86 participants representing 61 museums:

- ▶ Introduction to Trusteeship workshop
- ► Making the Most of Meeting and Event Hire workshop using museum spaces for income generation
- ▶ Project Grants Presentation and 1:1 meetings
- ▶ ILM Project Management course
- ► Business Planning workshop
- ▶ In the Spotlight: What is News? Interactive workshop
- Meeting Point programme commissioning contemporary artists

Workforce Development & Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

81 participants representing 58 museums:

- ▶ Revamped Diversity Champions programme included four workshops for 12 museums
- ► Eight museums received a Mental Health Access Audit report and attended a workshop on Mental Health Access Audit training
- Three 'Volunteers in the Workplace' workshops covering mental health, alternative volunteering roles and creating a more diverse volunteer base

Annual Events

- ► Conference 2019 covered all strands of the programme with 121 participants from 81 organisations
- West Midlands Volunteer Awards 32 shortlisted volunteers or volunteer groups representing 21 museums

Programme Delivery and Impact

"Consultation with the regional Museum Development Officer, and her networks provided invaluable in-depth knowledge and information on the cultural sector".

Overall this year has been strong with activity in all strands exceeding targets, and high levels of satisfaction with the programme – all events were rated excellent 92% or good 8% throughout the year.

The programme has developed the practice of each museum receiving details of activities they have participated, which is now provided annually, and this has been well received. Museums also have the opportunity to undertake a more in-depth analysis of their organisation through the Self Assessment Tool. The combination of these two documents means that museums have additional information for their forward planning, as well as providing useful information for the programme as a whole.

Accreditation

"The Museum Accreditation scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries." ACE. 2018

The programme kept museums informed throughout the Museum Accreditation scheme review and re-launch, and responded to the new Accreditation Standard, providing specific training to address new requirements.

The programme achieved the stated objectives for this strand, with the required number of workshops and events, despite the fact that these had to take part in the latter part of the year due to the launch of the new Accreditation standard in November. Given the timing, it was not possible to meet the target of new museums achieving Accreditation, but overall all 139 museums kept their Accreditation status and received support, with 76 museum attendances at Accreditation events.

Delivery

The programme has provided individual advice, group training and projects, helping those retaining their Accredited status, those Working Towards Accreditation, and those preparing for the first step to becoming Accredited and completing Eligibility Questionnaires.

The regular updates on Accreditation and Accreditation team speaking at various workshops, helped to foster better relationships between museums and the Accreditation team.

Emerging Issues

Some Local Authority museums continue to undergo regular restructures, with reduced staff numbers, which has led to missed Accreditation return deadlines and a shift to Provisional status. Potential new applicants have delayed submitting Eligibility Questionnaires due to uncertainty over implications of the Accreditation review.

Progress and Impact

It is clear that the team has provided regular information and support during a period of significant change, contributing to the maintenance of numbers of Accredited museums.

The Accreditation event on Collections was particularly well received:

"Each presentation provided useful insights based on extensive and relevant practical experience."

Pen Museum

"Really impressed"

Participation

The Pen Museum took part in a range of activities: Secret Shopper, Access Audit, Call to Adventure and Volunteer Awards, along with training days. The organisation has just one part-time member of staff, along with volunteers, and both the member of staff and volunteers took part in the programme.

Background

The member of staff is new to the organisation and had identified a range of issues to be addressed – at the heart of which is the importance of visitor numbers and therefore improving these was key to overall development of the museum.

Impact

The involvement in the activities all contributed to the focus on visitor experience and numbers and the development of a long term strategy:

- The museum had already identified their core demographic (retired 50-60 year olds) and the Secret Shopper activity helped them to understand how to reach younger audiences, including that young people do not see the relevance of the museum. The museum plans to tackle these misconceptions, which has informed plans to develop marketing materials.
- ► The Mental Health Access Audit has led to changes in the website, so that visitors feel more prepared, as well as changes in how people can be shown through the museum
- A range of training and activities has contributed to improvements in marketing, with a new leaflet, updates on the website and a volunteer leading on social media
- One of the volunteers participated in Call to Adventure focusing on improving the education offer to schools. The volunteer is now a Trustee and the museum is undertaking outreach sessions at the Birmingham children's library to reach younger visitors.

The activities have been "extremely important" to the museum: "it has been vital, and made me think of things I wouldn't have thought of otherwise". Staff and volunteers were impressed by the training, and particularly noted that the follow up resources were very helpful. The training was seen as "inspiring ... not death by powerpoint", and both the range of training on offer and style of trainers was praised.

Audiences

The programme supported museums to understand and develop their audiences, particularly young audiences, with a focus on data collection to inform future planning.

Delivery

A key focus was to encourage data collection on existing and potential audiences, delivered through a combination of standalone training workshops and learning through specific activities over a defined period of time. The Mystery Shopper programme was guided by the experience of key visitor groups, primarily young people, whilst Access Audits provided site audits with recommendations to support museums to become more accessible in relation to mental health.

The programme achieved the stated objectives for this strand, and delivery was in line with targets, with some areas of activity, such as numbers using Audience Finder and Small Grant applications, being exceeded.

Emerging Issues

Research suggests that there is currently no consistent approach to collecting audience data across small/medium sized museums. The programme recognises that museums require support to undertake primary research to produce strategic audience development plans.

Progress and Impact

There has been a wide range of activities this year, and the programme is clearly responding to the needs of different sized museums and ensuring that audience development activities are founded on a strong understanding of local communities and current visitors. This builds on the recommendations from the previous evaluation which suggested broadening the Access Audit approach so that audience development work was based on a such evidence.

The audience development activities are also succeeding in encouraging museums to consider hidden disabilities, including mental health issues.

Secret Museums identified a marked difference in the experience of 16-25 year olds and those aged 45 years+, and that museums continue to require support in effectively engaging with the younger age group age. The programme will continue to work with partners to carry out more detailed analysis of the data captured to create individual action plans for museums.

Feedback on the Exceeding Visitor Expectations workshop included:

"The speaker spoke clearly and was easy to understand. The presentation was done expertly and efficiently."

Participants were also clear about how the workshop would help them move forward:

"I plan to pass on what I've learnt during the session to my colleagues back at the museum [and] bring up the ideas on making the site more accessible to members of the public."

Rugby Art Gallery And Museum

"Everything has been good... Long may it continue"

Participation

Staff at the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum took part in a range of activities across all strands including: Diversity Champions, Call to Adventure, Secret Museums, Mental Health Access Audit, Expert Eye, and events including the conference, Project Management and Volunteers in the Workplace.

Background

The museum had identified a number of key issues prior to involvement in these activities including the fact that the audiences and collections don't represent the demographic of the borough, particularly West Indian and South Asian communities and the growing Polish and Portuguese communities.

Impact

The involvement in the activities had an impact across the organisation:

- ► The Diversity Champions programme helped them to develop their ideas on reaching and reflecting the local communities, providing greater context to their planning. This has fed into an Arts Council England application and their forward planning, with an Equality Action Plan now being integrated into service planning.
- The museum had identified their Social History Collection as an area to address, wanting to broaden the stories that the museum tells. The Expert Eye programme focused on the Pharma Collection within this wider collection and provided the expertise to know what was safe to show, and how to present the collection. This helped enormously, particularly in relation to risk management, identifying items that needed to be disposed of (such as controlled drugs), or treated. As a result, the next exhibition will be this collection, which has not been accessible before, and staff said that Expert Eye was "crucial for sharing experience", and that a relatively small amount of input "made a massive difference".
- The Access Audit identified improvements to be made to the website and signage in the visitors' centre. The museum will require investment for these changes, but this work has identified specific tasks and helped to provide a strong case for support for the work.

The activities have helped the museum to address identified issues around collections and audiences in the short term and has informed the forward planning for the next five years. In addition, the Diversity Champions activity has informed the development of the Arts Council England bid, which if successful, will inform delivery in the coming years.

Collections

The Collections strand continues to be popular. During the year the delivery responded to a range of issues including the loss of specialist knowledge in the sector, increasing the confidence of staff and volunteers to talk about their collections in engaging ways and the perennially popular collections care skills training.

Delivery

Collections care skills training has provided the fundamentals of good practice. The programme addressed the loss of specific curatorial expertise through training and subject specialist placements including the Expert Eye programme which increased understanding of orphaned or overlooked collections.

Delivery was broadly in line with targets, with some areas of activity exceeding targets, and others affected by capacity within individual museums, including responses to the Skills Survey and geocaching activities.

Emerging Issues

Regional and national evidence has highlighted that museum collection stores are at or near capacity. The ongoing need to rationalise collections has been addressed through networks and events including Banish the Backlog, a Collections Trust outreach project. However, the programme recognises that there is potential to expand this work and increase the number of museums undertaking collections review, rationalisation and disposal.

The continually evolving digital landscape means that there is a need to support museums to make the most of the latest technologies to interpret their collections in relevant and accessible ways. The programme is working with industry leading partners to develop confidence in museum staff and volunteers to find innovative ways for audiences to discover their collections.

Progress and Impact

The Collections strand continues to be an important and well regarded aspect of the programme, and the demand for events is an indicator of this. Programme staff have noted the popularity of this strand, noting that any collections event "has people flocking to it". In the last year, the team have been successful in growing and diversifying the size and type of museums taking part in events and activities.

Feedback on the Every Object Tells A Story event included:

"I have come away with practical tips on how myself & my organisation can improve the conversations we have about our collection. It has helped me to see it from a different perspective and will improve my delivery."

Feedback on Banish the Backlog:

"I just wanted to say thank you for suggesting that we participate in the Museum Backlog Project. I found yesterday's meeting very useful and it answered quite a lot of my queries with regards to the Accreditation application."

Shrewsbury Art Gallery And Museum

Participation

Staff at the Shrewsbury Art Gallery and Museum took part in a range of activities including: Fluid Specimen Collection Conservation training, Mental Health Access Audit, and received a small grant to create an exhibition with a LGBT+ group, following involvement in the Diversity Champions programme the previous year.

Background

The museum has a focus on health and wellbeing, although mental health had not been identified as a key issue previously, the involvement in the Access Audit contributed to this aim. As a Local Authority organisation, a range of the training courses on HR, contracts, policies and procedures were not seen as relevant.

Impact

The museum felt that there had been some benefit to involvement in the programme, they felt that the wider impact was more difficult to gauge:

► The Access Audit resulted in "interesting practical recommendations" and the museum felt that it was good to get an independent view of the space, and the museum now provides more comfortable seating. Whilst they were glad they participated they felt it was difficult to measure the impact of the changes.

The organisation also accessed training and support beyond the programme from other providers, where specific needs were not met. This includes Museum Association training, and support from the National Autistic Society.

The museum felt that the programme was a useful resource in the region, and wanted to engage further in the programme but felt that:

- ▶ There was a lack of clarity about the remit of the programme
- There was a need for more 'aspirational' events and training, which moved beyond those targeted at managers or were very practical, particularly those which looked at the wider cultural landscape of the museum sector.
- ► It would be helpful to have a greater input to the programme, being part of the process rather than being "at the end of the list of training courses"

Resilience and Conference

The programme provided a wide range of activities focused on resilience, in addition to the national conference, which took place in March 2019.

Delivery

Overall, the delivery exceeded targets with additional activity and engagement across the strand.

The conference, as in previous years, was a particular highlight, with a range of speakers and training focusing on visitor experience, diversity, fundraising, the revised Accreditation standard, engaging young people, energy efficiency and commissioning contemporary artists. The event also enabled participants in activities throughout the year to share their stories, disseminating learning.

The programme was also involved in the design and pilot of a nationally consistent diagnostic tool (referred to in the West Midlands as the Self Assessment Tool, SAT). The SAT, launched in December 2018, asks respondents to score their organisation against key areas including Governance and Leadership, Financial Planning, Working Practices, Audiences and Collections, and is designed to highlight best practice and prioritise areas for development, providing a benchmark for the future. An advisory report is then created based on the organisation's identified needs.

Emerging Issues

The resilience of the sector overall is affected by the culmination of issues affecting the other strands – lack of capacity, loss of curatorial and specialist knowledge, affecting the overall resilience of individual organisations and the sector as a whole. This has also affected take up in this strand, including the SAT take up, and responses to the Annual Museum Survey.

Progress and Impact

The programme has provided a range of activities covering different themes and which are suited to organisations of different sizes.

The conference attendance (121 attendees) was an increase on the previous year (107 attendees).

There is no doubt that the programme improves the resilience of individual museums and the sector as a whole, through this strand, and the overall programme. In the coming years it would be useful to challenge museums further in terms of innovative and entrepreneurial practice, and to seek ways to encourage this.

Feedback on the Project Management workshop included:

"One of the best training sessions because: I learned practical skills, resources to take away - tools to use, great practical networking opportunity, great for CV also with (ILM) accreditation."

Participants attending the Introduction to Trusteeship training highlighted their reasons for attending the event:

"A better understanding of the role of my trustees and their point of view, hopefully enabling me to make better use of their expertise for my charity in the future."

Workforce Development & Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Workforce Development and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) programme delivered a broad range of content in 2018/2019, building upon the previous three years.

Delivery

Overall, the delivery exceeded targets with additional workshops and strong take up across the range of activities.

The 'Open to All' Mental Health Access Audits provided training, site visits and a bespoke audit report including recommendations to support museums to become more inclusive and accessible in relation to mental health.

The Diversity Champions scheme was redeveloped based on recommendations from the previous evaluation and feedback, including a greater focus on understanding data and creating a baseline to measure impact.

The Volunteering strand explored specific aspects of volunteer management through a range of training events and delivered the third annual West Midlands Volunteer Awards.

Emerging Issues

Although a large number of museums previously took part in the broader Access programme, recruiting for the Mental Health Access Audits proved more difficult. This was partially due to lack of capacity in museums, and possibly because mental health is a new area for many, and there was a lack of understanding of the relevance and urgency to engage with the issue. This was addressed by targeting invitations to museums who had attended previous mental health training or engaged with the wider EDI programme. Whilst successful, this approach does run the risk of working with a self selecting pool of museums who are already focused on improving diversity and inclusion.

As in previous years, capacity to engage presented barriers to participation, and to address this the programme encourages learning to be shared between colleagues where appropriate.

Progress and Impact

There is considerable progress in this area, but it is recognised that both workforce development and EDI are issues which cannot be fully addressed through one day training events, and that these are ongoing developments within museums. The level of understanding and engagement with EDI issues across the sector covers a wide spectrum, which also presents a challenge to the programme, particularly in areas such as mental health and hidden disabilities. In addition to the need to engage with diverse visitors, given the priority of this work for Arts Council England, it is an issue that all museums need to engage with. The programme recognises this fact and is seen as leading the way in EDI activities across the regional Museum Development programmes.

Feedback on Volunteers in the Workplace: creating a more diverse volunteer base event included:

The training was friendly, welcoming, informative and relevant to challenges facing the sector."

Feedback on Mental Health Access Audit Training included:

The approach was well thought out and thought provoking - I wasn't sure what to expect."

Conclusions and Next Steps

This year has been strong, with activity building on the learning of the previous three years. The programme has exceeded targets and received high levels of satisfaction.

Innovation

Innovation should be sustained through the continued involvement of organisations beyond the museum sector, including the cultural industries, as well as sharing examples of best practice from the UK and beyond.

Engagement

Historically (2015-18) there was highest engagement with museum specific collections training. Data for 2018-19 indicates that all other strands of the programme are now on a par and participation across all strands is evenly spread, demonstrating a more holistic approach to museums' organisational development.

To ensure maximum legacy for events and programmes, resources developed as part of the programme should be easily accessible and promoted on the website.

Advocacy

The collection of nationally comparable data is vital to evidence the impact of museums in the West Midlands. The programme recognises the value of encouraging museums to complete the Annual Museum Survey and should continue to collate and process this information.

Conference

The reasons for attending the conference were varied

"The agenda was attractive. Chance to network. Update on sector changes and funding."

"I've been for several years and find the sessions really informative and it's great to network with local museums."

"I come every year to keep up to date with latest news and developments."

> "Tony's presentation. Transformational! Very inspiring and informative."

Small Grants

"Thank you so much for the cheque for our audience development project. Your support is so very much appreciated and helps us take on ambitious and inclusive projects that are very dear to us, but just could not deliver without your help. Thank you."

Volunteer Awards

"I'm absolutely thrilled that all the excellent work of our dedicated team of volunteers delivered as part of the visitor experience has been recognised in such a way. This is a terrific, collective pat on the back for them and every one of them."