



# Evaluation of West Midlands Museum Development 2019-21

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West Midlands Museum Development  
July 2021

Version 1.0



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## Executive Summary

This report highlights the work of the West Midlands Museums Development team, giving a picture of the valued support given to the museum community between 2019-2021. It particularly notes the responsive and successful transformation of the service at the outset of the pandemic, which enabled the team to provide much-needed information, training and support during this time of great change and uncertainty to help museums increase their relevance and effectiveness for their audiences.

*“It’s great to still have an agency like the WMMD as it can feel isolating when there is no-one pulling people and expertise together.”*

*“A huge thank you for everything the WMMD team do. We know they are always there and available to offer support and guidance.”*

### Overview

West Midlands Museum Development (WMMD) is part of a network of Museum Development programmes across England funded by Arts Council England (ACE). Established in April 2015, and managed by Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, the WMMD team deliver a broad and varied programme of events, training, projects and grants to support, challenge and inspire museums across the wider West Midlands.

While 2018-9 had established the new programme, building on the success of the previous four years, 2019-21 was a time of contrasts. 2019-20 took forward the momentum of the programme’s first year, embedding learning and saw museums act on their training, audits and peer learning activity. And then, Covid-19 stopped museums in their tracks, as museums closed, and the country locked down.

Against this background WMMD ‘pivoted’ its support offer online, the team adapting quickly and commissioning support and training relevant for changed museum needs in a Covid-19 environment. This was appreciated, particularly the networks and connectivity provided at a challenging time. Many took the opportunity presented by their museum closure to take advantage of training, which in ‘normal times’ they find difficult to attend events due to staff capacity or cost.

*“... It is great to see other professionals in the region even if I don't know them. I think WMMD are ... doing an excellent job in offering events like this via zoom - even if the lockdown ends, attendance by Zoom is really helpful as it helps manage travel costs, travel time, and childcare issues.”*

### The programme in numbers

#### 2019-20

- 126 museums participated (90% of Accredited museums)
- 42 events reaching 507 participants
- 100% of rated events were considered ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, with 86% ‘excellent’
- Eight development projects with 56 museums – from *Audience Champions*, to *Open to All*, to *Expert Eye*
- Six 1:1 advice conversations on ACE Project Grants
- Small Grants to a value of £21,960, supporting eight museums
- Volunteer Awards saw 33 finalists from 27 museums<sup>1</sup>

#### 2020-21

- 125 museums participated (89% of Accredited museums)
- 35 events reaching 479 participants
- 40 weekly Coffee and Chatter drop-in sessions with 223 attendees.
- 100% of rated events were considered ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. With 90% ‘Excellent’.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mdwm.org.uk/news/winners-west-midlands-volunteers-awards-2019/>

- Six development projects with 31 museums from *Family Friendly Museum Audit to Fit for Purpose? Collecting Strategies*.
- 16 1:1 advice conversations on bid writing, business planning, HR and accessibility.
- 14 Small Grants to a value of £51,081 responding to the immediate needs of museums to navigate Covid-19 and move towards reopening. 3 Emergency Grants £6,867; 11 Recovery Grants £44,214, with additional support from ArtFund
- 21 organisational health checks.

## WMMD benefit and impact

Museums particularly value WMMD for:

- Stable, consistent and reliable presence
- Small Grants. All sizes of museums find these empowering and enable them to take forward new activities.
- Relevance of training, understanding that not all museums are the same (and places are fully funded)
- Awareness raising through training, keeping them up to date with progress - even if they can't act immediately

Over the last two years over 50% evaluation survey respondents have some increased confidence or skills in:

- Workforce and volunteering development
- Audience development
- Inclusion and Accessibility
- Interpretation
- Digital

The training and development programmes were appreciated even more than usual by museums and individuals used the Covid-19 hiatus to reflect, plan and upskill.

*“It has allowed us to be more outward thinking and has increased our capacity for digital engagement - we certainly looking at digital in a different way, experimenting how online content can complement or enrich the physical space of the museum.”*

*“Although the Covid period has been very challenging, one positive is that it has allowed time to plan and strategise.”*

*“Covid-19 has meant we had to adapt and change all of our plans during the pandemic. The challenges of closing, furlough, staff changes and reopening have taken up all of our time and resources, and meant that long-term ambitions are paused. It has also provided a period of reflection and allowed us to reassess our future ambitions.”*

## Emerging areas of need or improvement

The continuity of Museum Development support is valued by the sector. However, it is increasingly clear that we have not all experienced the same pandemic and consequently have emerging and different needs. Over the coming months and years we will learn how the ongoing fall out of the pandemic impacts on museums, and whether and how audiences are happy to return.

Immediate priorities for museums at the time of this report are:

- Reopening the museum: rebuilding audiences, continuing to adapt programmes and measures to navigate the ongoing unknown post-Covid-19 environment, staff training
- Volunteer recruitment succession, training and development, in particular rebuilding the volunteer base post lockdown
- Restoring income generation
- Strengthening confidence in governance

The distinctiveness of Museum Development support comes from its live understanding of the museums in its areas, the challenges facing them, bridging the distance between museums and potential opportunities. As the country reopens, this will be as important as during the pandemic, with further change and responsiveness required by museums.

As an ACE-funded programme, Museum Development is well placed to anticipate the opportunities for *Let's Create*, its 2020-30 Strategy, and ensure museums are supported to deliver effectively with a deep and lasting impact on their local places and the people who live and work there.



*Top terms used by respondents when asked what they valued about WMMD taken from 'Three Words' in 2019-21 Museum Development evaluation survey*

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## I. Overview

West Midlands Museum Development (WMMD) is part of a network of Museum Development programmes across England funded by Arts Council England (ACE). Established in April 2015, and managed by Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust (IGMT), the WMMD team deliver a broad and varied programme of events, training, projects, and grants to support, challenge and inspire museums across the wider West Midlands.

IGMT was awarded £1,230,380 by Arts Council, through its Sector Support Organisation funding, to deliver the 2018-22 WMMD programme in support of *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*. Due to Covid-19 this programme has been extended by a year until 2023.

The programme is led by a Programme Manager, supported by a team of Museum Development Officers, overseen by the Director of Museum Development at IGMT. Each of the WMMD team take responsibility for a particular part of the West Midlands together with a particular theme of work.

While 2018-9 had established the new programme, building on the success of the original funded four years, 2019-21 was a time of contrasts – a period like no other. 2019-20 took forward the momentum of the programme's first year, embedding learning and saw museums act on their training, audits and peer learning activity – with many experiencing their 'best year ever'. And then, out of the blue, came Covid-19.

At the start of March 2020, the situation was uncertain and changing daily. First came advisory closures, swiftly followed by a country-wide lock down. Few anticipated, let alone planned for, over a year of disruption and many more years to rebuild finances and audiences. Challenges for museums were manifold and beyond the immediate public health emergency. Those, who previously had been successfully entrepreneurial and whose business models were reliant on income generation lost that overnight. Vulnerable staff and volunteers were shielding or self-isolating. Many were furloughed or redeployed to deliver local authorities' emergency response. Staff adapted to working from home – some museums had better remote IT access than others, and many juggled home working with home schooling.

Across the year the easing of restrictions, introduction of tiers and further lockdowns affected different museums differently. Museums were permitted to reopen in May 2021 and, at the time of this report, the removal of all restrictions was anticipated in July. The furlough scheme was intended to continue until the autumn. It was still uncertain in what numbers audiences and school visits will return. A small number of museums were not anticipating opening for some time.

Against this background WMMD 'pivoted' its support offer online, adapting quickly and commissioning support and training relevant for changing museum needs in a Covid-19 environment. This included identifying needs and responding, often in ways not previously offered, such as rolling applications for grants so museums could access funds as they needed them.

Recognising this unusual time, the approach to the programme evaluation differs from previous years. It drew on WMMD programme data and sought to supplement this with a short evaluation survey and a series of conversations with a small number of museums to capture their journeys across both years. All West Midlands museums were invited to complete a short online questionnaire, whether they had participated in the programme or not. Follow up conversations were held with a representative sample of participating museums. (Listed in Appendix B)

## 2. Museums in the West Midlands

The West Midlands has a vibrant and varied museum sector. Museums vary from the smallest volunteer-run organisation such as The Lace Guild Museum, to local authority services such as Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum, university-run museums such as Winterbourne House and Garden, large scale charitable trusts such as Birmingham Museums Trust and World Heritage Sites such as the museums located in the Ironbridge Gorge.

Type	Number
English Heritage	3
Independent	78
Local authority	37
National	1
National Trust	16
University	6

*Numbers of museums Accredited and Working Towards Accreditation*

There are 131 Accredited<sup>2</sup> museums in the West Midlands, with a further 10 officially Working Towards Accreditation. Eight of these museums are funded as part of Arts Council's National Portfolio. See Appendix A.

They play an important part in the social, educational, wellbeing and economic life of the area, reaching over 3,086,000 people each year, with an estimated economic impact of £61.3 million.<sup>3</sup> This is undertaken against a challenging funding environment, for example local authority investment in West Midlands museums has reduced by 22.1% since 2013.<sup>4</sup>

The 2015-17 *Active Lives* survey reported that museum engagement in the West Midlands (along with arts engagement) to be significantly lower than the national average.<sup>5</sup> Addressing this requires new ways of thinking, for example Birmingham has the youngest population of any European city which is a potentially significant audience, but one which would require a different offer.<sup>6</sup>

Museum Development takes an inclusive approach, but focusses its resources on those Accredited, Working Towards Accreditation, or considering Accreditation and not part of the National Portfolio or designated as 'National'. During 2020-21, in response to the pandemic, the team opened up their resources and support to the wider museum sector, including freelancers, and didn't apply this prioritisation. This support and resources are offered free at point of access, minimising barriers to participation.

As part of the immediate support to help museums navigate their survival situation museums in the West Midlands benefitted from £657,261 Arts Council Emergency Funding (19 grants) and £13,806,995 from the Culture Recovery Fund (29 grants).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Accreditation is the UK's museum standards scheme delivery by Arts Council England and UK partners. [www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme)

<sup>3</sup> <https://mdwm.org.uk/annual-museums-survey/>

<sup>4</sup> Arts Council Local Authority investment dashboard <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieYjQzYTUxOTItMGY0My00OWMlLTlhMDYtNmE0YWY4NDkzMmY3liwidCI6ImM3YTZmYzMyLTc1MzgtNGlwZSIhOTZlLTA1Zjg1NTAwN2MxMSJ9>

<sup>5</sup> Arts Council Audience and participation dashboard <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieYjQzYTUxOTItMGY0My00OWMlLTlhMDYtNmE0YWY4NDkzMmY3liwidCI6ImM3YTZmYzMyLTc1MzgtNGlwZSIhOTZlLTA1Zjg1NTAwN2MxMSJ9>

<sup>6</sup> [www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20102/job\\_vacancies/490/working\\_in\\_birmingham](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20102/job_vacancies/490/working_in_birmingham)

<sup>7</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/culture-recovery-fund-data](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/culture-recovery-fund-data)

### 3. A dynamic landscape

In addition to the realities of a pandemic and post-pandemic world, a number of other changes affected the museums and Museum Development operating environment.

2019 ended with a new Prime Minister and a General Election. Policy changes included announcing the 'end of austerity'. Uncertainty about the European Union exit timetable was concluded when the UK left the EU on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 after previous postponements. Due to the last-minute negotiations, it was not fully clear what the impact on museums would be – whether on workforce, touring or cost and availability of materials. Subsequently, Covid-19 has masked some of the impact.

Early 2020 saw floods impact on the West Midlands, including temporarily closing and disrupting venues across the region. This is an illustration of an extreme weather event that is predicted to become more frequent in future. Nationally, the climate emergency didn't go away, but attention turned to the more immediate challenge of the pandemic. The climate emergency remains an increasingly urgent and defining issue that every part of society needs to address. Museums have participated in projects to reduce energy costs, and increased their awareness of the issues, however many have yet to fully comprehend what actions they are able to and will need to take to minimise and mitigate impact, whether in terms of collections care, building fabric, or tourism.

Arts Council England launched their new strategy for 2020-30, *Let's Create*, in January 2020 with its ambition to see "A country transformed by culture. Bringing us together, happier, healthier. To excite, inspire, delight. To enrich our lives." Its outcomes focus on how people can develop personal creativity at every stage of their lives; how culture is created by and with people in their communities, and how it shapes the places in which they live, work, learn and visit; and the development of an innovative, collaborative and internationally-facing professional cultural sector. These are underpinned by four Investment Principles, setting out how cultural organisations need to develop so that they can better deliver the three Outcomes: Ambition and Quality, Inclusivity and Relevance, Dynamism and Environmental responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

May 2020, triggered by the death of George Floyd in America, saw protests in many countries across the world, including the UK. With protesters marching as part of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), campaigning for freedom, justice and equality. This became a wake-up call for all those who did not fully comprehend how racial inequality continues to function in England at every level, and that this was something not just confined to the police in the USA. As a result, museums asked questions of their role and the extent to which they create a welcome for all. It was noted that museums with strong community networks were best placed to reimagine their offer throughout the pandemic and remain relevant.

Locally, preparations were underway for Coventry's year as the UK City of Culture and the Commonwealth Games and associated cultural festivals due to take place in Birmingham in 2022. These are opportunities for West Midlands museums to get involved and reach new audiences.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/strategy](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/strategy)



## 4. Headline outcomes and impact

*“A huge thank you for everything the WMMD team do. We know they are always there and available to offer support and guidance.”*

### 4.1 2019-20 in numbers

**126 museums participated** in the WMMD programme equating to 90% of Accredited Museums in the West Midlands,<sup>9</sup> with a further 18 non-Accredited museums.

The team delivered:

**42 Events** reaching 507 participants. Training ranged from *A-Z of Accreditation* to *Digital Literacy* to *Welcoming all Customers*.

100% of rated events were considered ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’, with 86% ‘excellent’.

#### **Eight projects supporting 38 museums**

- Audience Champions
- Banish the Backlog 2019-20
- Call to Adventure
- Diversity Champions 2019/2020
- Expert Eye #5: Revealing Hidden Histories
- Family Friendly Audit
- Open to All 2019: Accessibility Audits
- Open to All 2019: Welcoming Neurodivergent Visitors

#### **Six 1:1 advice conversations** on National Lottery Project Grants

Awarded:

**Eight Small Grants totalling £21,960** to enable testing and implementation of ideas and activity to increase access to and engagement with collections.

- Bewdley Museum ‘Forging Memories’. Becoming a Dementia Friendly venue and outreach visits
- Heritage and Culture Warwickshire Audience development research into the local communities to inform Audience Development Strategy and Equality Action Plan
- Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum ‘Wellbeing Workshop’ for those living with Dementia and their carers
- Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery ‘Talking Collections’. Improving the use of handling collections to engage with groups of people with dementia and those at risk of social isolation
- Potteries Museum and Art Gallery Cultural Exchange. A six-month programme of events to stimulate an active Asian collection policy to engage with and reflect changing local community
- Royal Birmingham Society of Artists ‘Combating Loneliness in Later Life’. Delivering a range of activities during forthcoming exhibitions
- Staffordshire Archives and Heritage ‘On YOUR Doorstep: Creative Conversations Connecting the Shared Stories of Staffordshire’. Improving the reach of the service
- Staffordshire Yeomanry Museum ‘Collections and Community Co-creation in the Digital Age’. Improving access by digitising the collection and engagement with new audiences

**Volunteer Awards** with 33 finalists from 27 museums.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Reasons for non-participation are not fully clear. They included English Heritage museums – who are supported by wider organisational infrastructure and a number embarking on their journey towards Accreditation.

<sup>10</sup> <https://mdwm.org.uk/news/winners-west-midlands-volunteers-awards-2019/>

## The Winners

Today has been filled with hard working women and men  
But here are the four winners and some words about them

Showing fantastic support and a knowledge that's shared  
It's Barry Bull from Chasewater who has proved that he cares  
With his level of commitment over the past 50 years (years)  
His work ethic is an inspiration to all of his peers

With an ambitious talent for getting the community on board  
It's Worcester Heritage & Amenity Trust that takes home the group award  
The Tudor House Museum wouldn't be open without them  
So your score for this is a ten out of ten

Understanding their audience and improving access to collections in store  
It's a challenging project for the Reminiscence Volunteer team to go for  
But they develop good practice which really spreads throughout  
So the Birmingham Back to Backs deserves a shout-out

The IT savvy, young person in the know  
Is the Waterworks museums – Alex Rowe  
He's the whole package who makes blogs interesting  
A young mind of ideas that keeps manifesting

So thank you to the museums, the nominees, and of course, the winners too  
Keep on pushing the boundaries and keep on being you!

*Poem celebrating the volunteer-run museum awards by Matt Windle Birmingham Poet Laureate 16/18*

## 4.2 2020-21 in numbers

**125 museums participated** in the WMMD programme equating to 89% of Accredited (and Working Towards Accreditation) museums in the West Midlands,<sup>11</sup> with a further 24 non-Accredited organisations.

The team delivered:

**35 Events** reaching 479 museum and freelance participants. Training ranged from *Banishing the Backlog* to *Family Friendly Reopening* to *Writing an Emergency Funding Bid*, along with further Museum Development Network Equality Diversity and Inclusion training.

100% of rated events were considered 'Excellent' or 'Good'. With 90% considered 'Excellent'.

Introduced and held 40 weekly **Coffee and Chatter** informal drop-in sessions to keep the sector connected with 223 attendees.

**Six Projects** with 31 museums supported:

- Audience Champions I
- Equality Action Plan 2020/21
- Expert Eye #6
- Family Friendly Museum Audit
- Fit for Purpose? Collecting Strategies

<sup>11</sup> Reasons for non-participation of 16 museums are not fully clear. They included English Heritage museums – who are supported by wider organisational infrastructure and a number embarking on their journey towards Accreditation.

- One year's Membership Plus to Association of Cultural Enterprises

**16 1:1 advice conversations** on bid writing, business planning, HR and accessibility.

Awarded **14 Small Grants to a value of £51,081** responding to the immediate needs of museums to navigate Covid-19 and move towards reopening (Three Emergency grants £6,867; 11 Recovery grants £44,214, with additional support from ArtFund):

- Brampton Museum. The installation of additional Wi-Fi to enable online sessions for schools, talks and virtual access to parts of museum not currently available.
- Claymills Victorian Pumping Station. The production of professional quality marketing materials aimed at potential donors and sponsors. Donors to provide financial support make Claymills available to the public in the new post-Covid-19 normal.
- George Marshall Medical Museum Remote. The replacement for Victorian Surgery workshops. 3D scan of artefacts describing the changes in surgery and anaesthesia; webpages to inform context; and create resources for teachers.
- Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum Project to take Haddie's Family Gallery online through a programme of engaging content designed by families for families.
- Ludlow Museum. The Museum remains closed and needs to reach out to a digital audience by sharing the collection online supported by specialist staff-training, and improved marketing.
- Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery. To develop new family audiences for the museum who cannot access the museum digitally. Working with an artist and new community partner, produce creative packs and host workshops inspired by the museum's collections.
- Rugby Art Gallery and Museum. To host a range of onsite and offsite workshops inspired by the Brick-by-Brick Exhibition to boost footfall, re-engage existing audiences and encourage new visitors into the museum spaces.
- Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery. Reinterpreting the colonial aspects of the collection and the Clive Statue with the sector, partner organisations and the wider community via digital platforms and interpretation boards.
- Staffordshire Museum Service Staffordshire. The Poet Laureate and a visual artist will carry out online activities, and create new on-line resources supporting audiences to share their experiences of Covid-19 and to enable the museum to capture these responses for the collections.
- The Barber Institute of Fine Arts. Adapting the Recovery Art programme to deliver online workshops. Developing the programme more widely with public events.
- The Lace Guild Museum. Preparations to re-open the museum including signage, one way system and PPE. Rebuild and extend awareness of the museum.

Three Emergency Grants were awarded to museums that were ineligible for either ACE's Emergency Response Fund or National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) Heritage Emergency Fund.

And carried out **21 Organisational Health Checks**

The level of engagement and almost seamless delivery was remarkable, given the extent of the disruption; demonstrating the value of the programme and the ongoing and indeed increased need during a time of change and uncertainty.

#### **4.3 Programme delivery**

It is clear that the numbers describe only a small part of the picture. Understanding how museums act on this and disseminate the learning across their whole organisation to inform their ongoing development and practices, to the benefit of their audiences, is an ongoing challenge. Especially as, organisational change and learning is ongoing and incremental; sometimes this action can happen a year or so down the line.

Over the last two years over 50% of evaluation survey respondents reported some increased confidence or skills in:

- Workforce and volunteering development
- Audience development
- Inclusion and Accessibility
- Interpretation
- Digital

Generally, people particularly value WMMD for:

- Stable, consistent and reliable presence.
- Small Grants. All sizes of museums find these empowering and enable them to take forward new activities.
- Relevance of training: understanding that not all museums are the same; and places are fully funded.
- Awareness raising through training: keeping them up to date with progress even if they can't act immediately.

*“Excellent support is provided through WMMD and Museum Development officers, for which we are grateful, and please continue in this manner.”*

89% of evaluation survey respondents consider WMMD, their relationship with the team and the quality of the support to be good or excellent.<sup>12</sup> Out of the three words used to describe what was valued about their experience of WMMD, ‘Supportive’ and ‘Informative’ were predominant.



Despite the challenging and unpredicted circumstances in which the programme was delivered, in terms of delivery against Arts Council’s five goals<sup>13</sup> more targets were met or exceeded than not.

<sup>12</sup> One museum had not had a happy experience over the past year and would have welcomed phone contact during that time.

<sup>13</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-organisation/our-previous-strategy-2010-20](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-organisation/our-previous-strategy-2010-20)

In 2019-20 35 targets were met or exceeded. 20 were not met or were delayed.  
In 2020-21 32 targets were met or exceeded. 22 were not met or were delayed.

See Appendix E for further detail.

At a first glance the rate of non-completion and below target indicators raise questions. A number of the non-delivery/delayed activities refer to events that could not proceed due to Covid-19. For example, the annual Conference was a measure for a number of activities. In 2019-20 the rapidly evolving situation was outpacing official advice and WMMD took the decision to postpone the venue-based event; the first National lockdown followed within days. During Covid-19 a number of other sector organisations transferred their annual conference online, resourced to use the best in online software and new means of presentation. Many were offered at no or low cost which, combined with the removal of the travel barrier, made them accessible to large tranches of the sector for the first time, for example the AIM and MA conferences. This meant there was limited benefit to WMMD in attempting to compete and therefore the resources were redeployed to be better used elsewhere.

The planned versus delivered summary actually demonstrates the ways in which the programme adapted and responded to the needs identified as a result of Covid-19, and other events such as Black Lives Matter. For example, incorporating learning from the Diversity Champions programme, creating EDI resource pages on the web and actively signposting to them, as well as introducing an EDI section to the newsletter to make visible actions.

It recognises that school visits were on hold and, while some audiences moved online, many programmes, such as the mystery shopper, needed to pause, and not all museums could provide access to their collections database for staff working from home due to licencing costs or IT facilities. Understandably, some museums dropped out of programmes as their priorities changed due to Covid-19 and staff were redeployed elsewhere within their local authority, or placed on furlough.

It should also be noted that from the end of 2019 until 4 May 2020 the team were one FTE down due to staff turnover. 0.5 FTE staff capacity provided through Staffordshire County Council was also redeployed for some of the time during the pandemic, seeing a reduction in delivery capacity for the programme. Despite this reduced capacity engagement was maintained.

## Adapting to Covid-19

The team worked to creatively respond to the challenges of Covid-19. Activity was repurposed. The existing grant scheme was adapted to cover overheads for the first time and turned into a rolling programme, as different museums needed support at different times. As the Cultural Recovery Fund threshold was too high for many, the team levered and pooled funds to create a bigger pot as an emergency bridge. Practical changes also included the introduction of grant payment via BACS.

Almost overnight, all WMMD delivery was adapted into a virtual format, using Zoom. Recognising that Zoom was new to most people the team produced practical 'how to' guides and include links to these on all invites. Bookings remained open until one hour before each event, supporting the last-minute bookings due to the nature of working patterns. To increase accessibility all events were live captioned.

Training sessions were shorted and made more frequent, with regular breaks scheduled and the level of interactivity assessed based on format (training/webinar). Recognising that work patterns were different, and technology offered new possibilities, events were recorded and uploaded to an online events page for people to access at their convenience. The team worked with developers to enable these changes and develop the resources beyond the regular website updates.

*"I am impressed with the style of learning delivered during WMMD sessions in an engaging and professional manner, all the presenters clearly have in-depth knowledge and expertise of the subject, deliver relevant notes that are concise and very helpful and also provide a useful opportunity to interact with other attendees via 'chat rooms' on certain topics and/or activities."*

As well as the changed format, the team also changed the focus of some planned programmes and adapted the content in response to the pandemic and the Black Lives Matters movement.

The team introduced 'Coffee and Chatter' – weekly informal networking sessions, to support individual wellbeing (recognising that people were working in isolation) and provided regular sector updates. People could drop in as and when they wanted to chat with peers.

*"Useful advice. Positively delivered. Also it was brilliant to see and hear from other museum people during this worrying time of isolation."*

Recognising the increase in reliance on the website (and that some may not have access to their work email accounts) there was a focus on regular updates, dedicated Coronavirus update pages and additional relevant resources.

Throughout, the team worked from home, establishing regular communication to manage the programme and support wellbeing.

## 5. Exploring programmes, projects, and initiatives

### 5.1 Overview

2019-20 was a year of momentum, building on 2018-19 and the previous programme.

The start of 2020-21 saw Covid-19 stop museums in their tracks, as they closed and the country locked down. Experience was different depending on the type and size of museum and the level of existing audience engagement. Some had most staff furloughed, with volunteers finding other priorities. With remaining staff and volunteers working from home, not all had access to the museum networks, others used the time to rethink their offer, plan and develop online engagement, and to take advantage of the responsive, online, and fully-funded WMMD offer.

*“It has allowed us to be more outward thinking and has increased our capacity for digital engagement – we are certainly looking at digital in a different way, experimenting how online content can complement or enrich the physical space of the museum.”*

*“Although the Covid period has been very challenging, one positive is that it has allowed time to plan and strategise.”*

*“Covid-19 has meant we had to adapt and change all of our plans during the pandemic. The challenges of closing, furlough, staff changes, and reopening have taken up all of our time and resources and meant that long-term ambitions are paused. It has also provided a period of reflection and allowed us to reassess our future ambitions.”*

*“Indirectly it has changed our whole model of operation. We are now looking at a much more digital future to reach our audience where they are.”*

The pivoting of the WMMD offer online was appreciated. Particularly the networks and connectivity provided at an extremely challenging time. People took advantage of their museum closure to engage in training: in ‘normal times’ they would find it difficult to attend events due to staff capacity or cost.

*“It was extremely useful to have the ability to access and attend these sessions in a safe manner during the Covid pandemic without a requirement for travelling to a venue.”*

### 5.2 Accreditation

The Accreditation Scheme sets out nationally-agreed standards, helping museums manage their collections properly, engage with visitors, and ensuring they are governed appropriately. As such, it underpins all Museum Development activity and is delivered as an integrated part of the programme.

West Midlands Museum Development provided advice, training, project and 1:1 support for museums wishing to work towards, obtain, and retain their Accreditation status. During 2019-20 and 2020-21 these included:

- A-Z of Accreditation
- Business Planning
- Banish the Backlog project

Targeted support was provided to those with Provisional status and those getting ready to apply.

The team also facilitated an Accreditation Mentor catch up event.

The team responded to events and requests during the year, adding in sessions on Emergency Planning training to further support Goal 1, in response to Mentors’ requests and reduced the

number of general support sessions, due to the scheme being placed on pause, and this enabled a focus on more urgent priorities.

In 2019-20, six events were attended by 80 participants representing 61 museums.

In 2020-21, five events were attended by 40 participants representing 27 museums. The reduction can be explained by the pause of the Accreditation Scheme and events associated with supporting museums to prepare for this.

100% were rated overall as 'Excellent'.

*"All aspects of Accreditation were covered and each explained clearly. Examples given were good and the level of detail and volume of information was excellent - really helpful! Tips ... were much appreciated."*

*"The session was a good starting point for me. The museum has recently been re-accredited, but I haven't been involved in the process at all. But next time I might be and I have learned the basics and the requirements of the application. And know who to call on for help."*

### **Banish the Backlog**

The very popular and much appreciated Banish the Backlog project was run in both years, and was led by the Collections Trust.

This programme is designed to help museums make documentation a priority, which is something that can get lost in the day to day 'opening the doors' and is an excellent example of effective collaboration between Museum Development support providers across the country.

In the West Midlands small groups of five museums in 2019-20 and an additional seven in 2020-21 worked together to remove some of the misunderstanding that have grown up around backlogs and provide tools and techniques, whether improved procedures or realistic plans to improve documentation or practical solutions to address issues particular to each museum.

In 2019-20, the number of Accredited museums remained the same at 131.

The Accreditation application and returns processing was paused from March 2020, recognising the more pressing priorities brought about by the pandemic. However, many museums used this time to take stock and review their policies, plans and practices.

### **5.3 Goal I: Collections**

The ambition of Goal I is that: *"Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries ... in the way that they use their collections to enrich people's lives."*<sup>14</sup>

During these two years the WMMD programme focussed on:

- Skills in collection's research, care and management
- 'Expert Eye' programme
- PR and media skills to enable museums to tell their collections' story

<sup>14</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone)



In 2019-20, eight events were held attracting 126 attendees from 107 museums, and in 2020-21 there were five events with 42 attendees from 36 museums. The reduction in 2020-21 reflects the fact that work on collections was restricted when museums were closed.

100% events were rated overall as 'Excellent'.

*"Brilliantly presented, easy to understand, no jargon, perfect!"*

*"As a person who is new to the sector, it has been a great way to learn about the things I will need to look out for in the future. I also enjoyed listening to other problems/issues that other people have found in their museums and how they have or are going to resolve them."*

To enhance and develop skills in collection's research, care and management through training and best practice sharing, the training included Collections Knowledge Cafes, ranging from photographing collections and intellectual property, to hazards in collections and integrated pest management. The latter two of these were initiated in response to lockdown and the need to support those who could access museum buildings, but might be less familiar with collections, in order to understand risks.

A creative approach saw museum participants building their PR and media skills to better tell stories about their collections, including a session about digital storytelling, and communicating with their audiences on-line about collections.

*"I was really nervous about this, but the tips and hints given and the chance to 'have a go' and receive an honest critique at the end was brilliant. Expertise delivered in a friendly and accessible way - directly tailored to the needs of the participants."*

Following the success of connecting with an expert from abroad in 2019-20, the team were confident in moving to a remote format in 2020-21. Museums Worcestershire received advice on portraits and Winterbourne House received advice from the Natural History Museum on its botanical collections. In practice, without access to stores and collections and, in many cases documentation software, and with many experts furloughed, this meant that the scheme could not operate fully, and explains the reduction in engagement.

A planned focus on stored collections was postponed.

Similarly, the circumstances meant that the 'Broadening Digital Horizons Programme', which had started with 'Digital Literacy' in 2019-20, refocussed in 2020-21 to to work with museums on a strategic analysis of their collection policies.

### Revealing Hidden Histories – also known as Expert Eye

*Revealing Hidden Histories* aims to make better use of underused collections, exploring an object or group of objects with an interesting, untold story.

The 'Expert Eye' programme provided access to specialist knowledge for those looking after collections, aiming to improve knowledge, expertise and confidence about collections held. It recognised that a lack of collections knowledge prevents effective sharing with audiences.

2019-20 was the fifth year of the programme, with WMMD brokering subject specialists to work with eight museums for up to three days. This time subjects included: portraits and botanical collections.

Once again, the team sourced relevant subject specialists to spend time with museum staff. This time subjects included portraits and botanical collections. The experts supported the museums with information and knowledge, but also helped to identify a way forward and consider some of the implications of telling the associated story.

A sharing events was held for participants to share with the wider museum network with 18 attendees from 13 museums.

*“Wonderful to hear so many inspiring 'hidden histories' projects feedback; inspired other ideas in our museum - lots to think about!”*

*“I found it all very informative and it gave me quite a lot to think about; there was enough together from the Hidden Histories to make me re-think how we do things in our museum.”*

*“Really interesting to hear the stories or revealed histories that were uncovered by fellow museum colleagues. It has inspired me to take a further look into a couple of lesser known objects/collections in the [...] Museum to see what I can uncover.”*

## 5.4 Goal 2: Audiences

The ambition of Goal 2 is that 'Everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries'.<sup>15</sup>

WMMD supported museums to improve their audience focus and ensure their offer is relevant for current and targeted audiences. This activity included:

- Expanding the 'Open to All' access programme to focus on specific areas of need, including mental health.
- Hosting workshops with tourism bodies to explore best practice beyond the museum sector.
- Developing the mystery shopper programme.
- Running a Small Grants scheme focussed on audience development projects (linked to the Creative Case).

As usual this was delivered by providing museums with intelligence and best practice from the sector and beyond (eNewsletters, website), including sharing audience data, and through the 'Training Together' programme.

<sup>15</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone)

In 2019-20, nine events were held attracting 134 attendees from 87 museums, and in 2020-21 there were ten events with 159 attendees from 93 museums. The difference between the two years is notable, and at first glance might be unexpected. However, the reason may be accounted for in some of the comments. People were valuing keeping in touch with colleagues during very strange times; the Zoom format was removing some of the barriers to attendance; but also, the remaining museum teams were needing to learn how to respond to their audiences' online needs.

The overall quality of the events was considered to be 'Good' or 'Excellent' (79%).

*"The course was excellent, really useful and thought provoking. Brilliantly delivered."*

*"Lots of new information which is going to be valuable to my CPD as well as very good for my organisation."*

*"This way of approaching a subject - series of days, stuff to do in between - is really good for developing skills and raising standards."*

*"As everything has been moved to online talks and webinars I feel the team adapted well to present the remaining sessions in a new format. As someone very new to Zoom meetings I felt it was presented well and I was able to engage just the same as if it was in person."*

*"Very relevant, amazing ideas"*

*"This is a great initiative, well done for creating it. It is always valuable to see how other museums and heritage organisations have been using their creativity in the current crisis."*

*"I really appreciated the opportunity to engage with others in the sector and to realise that we are not alone!"*

Training sessions, in partnership with The Audience Agency, built confidence in collecting and using audience data in planning, delivery and evaluation, informing the development of audience development plans. In the end, the cohort continued with this programme over both years, with a mix of reports, survey set ups, online training and 1:1 follow up planning advice.

Other activity to support a welcoming and accessible experience included the mystery shopper programme, with seven participating museums, Field Worker training with five museums and, working with individuals to develop a warm visitor welcome, exceed expectations and engage online too. The *Audience Champions* programme moved online, working with 12 museums to look at immediate, short-to-medium term plans responding to the unprecedented situation museums found themselves in.

This training activity and programme delivery was supported by eight Small Grants, awarded to museums to increase access to, and engagement with, collections.

## Open to All

*“I found the Open to All programme very interesting and useful. Meeting people from other sites at the training session helped me to understand how everyone thinks differently and interprets the term Accessibility. It has opened my eyes to looking at staff needs as well as the visitor.”*

*“It takes an unfamiliar eye to spot all things that would make a valuable difference.”*

During 2019-20 and 2020-21, the *Open to All* programme saw the commissioning of eight Neurodivergent Visitor audits and five Accessibility audits, together with associated training and peer learning. The programme of access audits changed due to the pandemic, refocussing on ensuring digital outputs were accessible and welcoming visitors back.

*“The audit process was positive and encouraging, helping us to see what could reasonably be achieved rather than criticising!”*

Motivation for participating were:

- Service improvement. Practical ways to increase accessibility.
- Informed approach. Wanting the knowledge and understanding to inform plans and future developments.
- Staff development, whether for an individual or volunteers.

Immediate skills and knowledge gained included:

- Improved understanding of access issues and removing barriers to access.
- Skills gained, include using simple non costly things to make considerable difference. *“Small changes can work, we have had some really positive feedback.”*
- Behaviour and progression: such as openness to seek perspectives of critical friends; Investing in training
- Attitudes and values: increased confidence to take necessary action.

*“The downstairs toilet is no longer used for storage and with the help of grants has been upgraded to an accessible toilet. The entrance hall has been re-organised and is now cleared of obstacles. An extensive re-organisation of the building with the library and sales area being moved downstairs and the office staff moved upstairs.”*

## Museum of Carpet

The granting of Cultural Recovery Funding in 2020 enabled the Museum of Carpet to introduce free entry and recruit new front of house staff to replace volunteers who did not return after the first lock-down. Responding to a 2019 survey, they created an exhibition of photographs of local scenes on large plinths outside of the museum to engage new local audiences. Launching with a ‘big bang’ they were successful in attracting a new and more diverse audience, in particular families from the local community.

## 5.5 Goal 3: Resilience

Goal 3's ambition is that *"The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable."*<sup>16</sup>

In any given year there is a core need for museums, particularly the smaller and volunteer-run museums, to maintain their core skills in governance, financial, staff and volunteer management. With the onset of the pandemic this need became more crucial due to the loss of income from visitors, retail and commercial use and ongoing bills, together with uncertainty as to when this income might be restored.

In 2019-20 the training, information, advice and guidance had included: Accounting and Financial Management for Small Charities, Maximising Earned Income, Evaluation - Measuring what Counts, Business Planning and Confident Bid Writing. A particular focus was on handling the media, whether television interviews or digital story telling.

11 events were attended by 110 people from 91 museums. All the training was rated as 'excellent' or 'good' (100%).

*"Very clever and informative. Made me completely rethink the application and definitely given more confidence in how to go about approaching it."*

*"Thorough but simple. really useful, both in terms of understanding as a trustee, but also appreciating the efforts from those on my board at work. Thanks :)"*

*"Quality and experience of the speakers was excellent. While one London case study was used, the majority of the focus was on case studies and events outside of London, which makes a huge difference to relevance for local museums. Too often events focus heavily on London, ignoring the issues that affect regional museums and heritage sites."*

Building on and rethinking their planned programmes, in 2020-21, the WMMD team repeated the previous years' programme, such as bid writing, and introduced support for workforce wellbeing during the time of uncertainty, including the practicalities of working from home and managing change. This included 1:1 bid writing support, which saw all five museums supported being successful in their applications for grants. A Managing Change programme targeted to support Trustees and succession planning, which included working with the Association of Chairs to run a session on Chairing Effective Online Board Meetings.

Seven events were held, attracting 86 attendees from 79 museums. Only two events were cancelled due to Covid-19, the rest were repurposed or postponed.

Carbon Literacy training was offered in support of environmental sustainability in 2019. Despite a response to the Climate Emergency being urgent, activity was understandably paused due to the more immediate task of navigating through the Covid-19 operating landscape.

*"Good idea for a training session as I've not seen any others like it. Also great that its free, thanks very much to WMMD for organising these training days, they are greatly appreciated."*

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<sup>16</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/great-art-and-culture-everyone)

### Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust has used the last year to research their business model. Before the pandemic they relied on ticket sales from their substantial tourist audience to deliver their offer – ‘we’re now in a place where we can explore new ways of delivery’. Supported by their Board they are looking at initiatives, such as ‘pay what you can’ and a membership model, with the whole business refocusing on Shakespeare.

While their over 40% overseas visitors will always be important to both the Trust and the economy of Stratford-upon-Avon, the organisation is looking to develop their local connections. ‘While we’re seen as a tourist attraction, we want to become more embedded in the local communities ... The Trust was set up by local people and Shakespeare is part of the sense of place of the town ... we want to shift perceptions of us and of Shakespeare’.

## 5.6 Goal 4: Workforce Development & Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Arts Council’s ambition for Goal 4 is that, *“The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled”*.

Supporting the ongoing development of the museum workforce is central to the Museum Development programme. Through training, but also peer support, good practice sharing, and information, advice and guidance. To inform this, an annual survey of training needs is undertaken, in collaboration with Museum Development partners across the country, the team commission evaluations of programmes and capture feedback from events.

Their ability to marshal this information to inform programming, attuned to what’s happening on the ground, and upcoming needs, allowed them to adjust the programme to take into account the impact of the pandemic. This was, both in terms of the subjects covered, such as introducing sessions on digital accessibility, and also in terms of testing new formats, such as the online lunchtime sessions on recruitment, retention and management of volunteers.

In 2019, four events focusing on equality, diversity and inclusion were held and were attended by 41 individuals, representing 36 museums. In 2020, moving online allowed 187 attendees from 55 museums to attend that year’s four events that responded to BLM and the inequalities highlighted during the pandemic.

Sessions included: Race and Ethnicity; Equality Action Planning and Digital Access and Inclusion for Visitors.

The events were rated ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ by all participants.

*"Was fantastic to hear from organisations of different sizes, different demographics, different collections. Lots of food for thought on programming and what communities aren't represented."*

*"Really useful to hear case studies of what other organisations are doing as well as the strategic picture from ACE."*

*"Really clear and interesting talk. Helped me contextualise our museum for neurodiversity."*

*"Thank you very much for pulling this session together. It's really important that as we rush to digital, we make sure we do it well and make it as accessible as possible..."*

*“[The trainer] was very approachable in her manner, and set clear guidelines and boundaries before we started the course... She introduced material that can be difficult to engage with in a non-threatening manner and was responsive to questions and issues that were brought up by the delegates.”*

In addition to the sessions commissioned by the team – welcomed for their high quality, local relevance and the tailoring to the particular mix of museum types – there has been a move to deliver shared training with the Museum Development network, and other Sector Support Organisations.

The annual conference had previously been a mechanism for inviting prominent speakers, sharing practice and developing connections across the sector. However, in both years this was cancelled due to the pandemic. Several national museum support organisations, with greater resources, moved their conferences online and removed the attendance fee, thus delivering the knowledge and practice sharing functions which freed up WMMD capacity to add value in different ways. The local connectivity was maintained through more regular informal events. Topics or sessions that were intended for conference sessions were in many cases redesigned and offered as alternative sessions, or postponed.

Particular focus on volunteers and volunteering was given prominence during 2020-21. This was a time of particular challenge for volunteers and volunteer-run museums, with many of their number being in the higher risk groups from the pandemic. There was a risk that volunteers wouldn't return once it was safe. At the time of writing some volunteer-run museums remain closed. There was also opportunity to diversify the pool of volunteers and look at new roles and means of recruitment. To this end lunchtime sessions were run on recruitment, retention and management of volunteers. The short 'lunchtime' format was particularly appreciated. Other targeted initiatives supported Trustees in managing change, sessions were introduced in response to feedback on training sessions, and included *Supporting the Wellbeing of your Workforce during Periods of Uncertainty and Change*. Overall, ten events were run, attracting 300 attendees from 150 museums. All were rated as 'Excellent'.

*“Complete and clear overview of the issues involved in retaining volunteers in a 'normal' situation as well as in the current Covid-19 context.”*

*“Being introduced to the concept of the psychological contract was very interesting and something to ensure that we understand and react to its creation and implementation.”*

### **The Waterworks Museum**

The Waterworks Museum are proud of their 'Community of Volunteers'. Pre pandemic they were delivering in excess of 2300 hours a year and across all aspects of the Museum. During 2020 they supported each other through the pandemic with regular contact and support, such as delivering provisions when colleagues were isolating. 'It comes from a solid base of working together – many of our volunteers have worked at Waterworks for over thirty years.'

With as many as 25% of the volunteers expressing a desire to retire, the Museum has successfully recruited a range of new and younger men and women. This is particularly important, as Waterworks is on a development curve that will need the continued commitment and new skills.

### Selly Manor

Selly Manor is fortunate to have more than twenty 'excellent volunteers' who are essential to the running of the museum, and in 2019 they took part in the WMMD Volunteer Awards for the first time. 'It was such a high quality event, and done in such a nice way ... it really made you feel that what you're doing is important'. Participation in the Awards was a success for everyone involved and was 'a great way of celebrating the great work that volunteers do for us'

### The Malvern Museum of Local History

Malvern Museum has been successful in their volunteer recruitment, welcoming 15 new people, all with useful skills, who are more diverse and reduced the age profile.

## 5.7 Goal 5: Children and Young people

Goal 5 is focussed in enabling *“Every child and young person to have opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries”*.

During 2019-20 and 2020-21, museums were supported to:

- Diversify their offer for young people – Centred on developing a family friendly offer, including family friendly reopening,
- Engage with their Local Cultural Education Partnership and Kids in Museums and,
- Take part in the *Call to Adventure* narrative immersion approach to learning through drama.

This area got off to a strong start, encouraging museums to diversify their offer with sessions on Family Friendly museums, promoting the work of the Learning and Culture Education Partnerships and the exploration of drama in museum education – introduced in response to the Education Audit.

In 2019-20, seven museums participated in the Family Friendly Museum sessions and eight museums in using Drama in the museum education offer, with four of these museums supported through *Call to Adventure*.

In 2020-21, much of the programme was paused, as many museums placed their education offer on hold as schools navigated the pandemic. A refocussed offer was presented online, addressing Family Friendly reopening and interactions in the new normal, with 30 museums participating.

*“We were impressed by how positive the Family Friendly Audit was; the final report provided realistic actions that we could carry out in order to further improve our service. The projects that have come out of our involvement with Museum Development (digital engagement and Family Friendly action group) have helped to break down barriers between teams within the arts service.”*

*“I have heard and read about Kids in Museums on social media but it was fantastic to hear more about this in person and to be able to ask questions.”*

*“Lots of practical, easy to implement ideas, with lots of links to further reading etc.”*

*“This was very good for smaller museums who don't have big budgets/lots of staff. Loved the no cost/low cost suggestions of meeting [the Kids in Museums] manifesto criteria.”*



### Call to Adventure

The *Call to Adventure* supported staff in using a ‘Narrative Immersion’ approach to the National Curriculum, whether historical, scientific, artistic or cultural, using drama to create “enquiry-led learning, investigation, problem solving, collaboration and active engagement with new knowledge and understanding”. It uses story to provide a creative and imaginative context where children face problems and challenges to solve on behalf of the characters that they meet. This interactive learning adventure aims to be exciting and memorable, and to inspire learning in the museum and beyond.

### A New Immersion Model

After taking part in the *Call to Adventure* programme, Heritage and Culture Warwickshire and the Brampton Museum, Newcastle under Lyme developed and introduced new immersive narratives, resources and activities on the Romans and on toys. This ‘sticky learning’ was so successful that NLHF then provided funding for the Brampton Museum to develop a Second World War project.

## 5.8 Communications and networks

A full review of the WMMD website was undertaken, with a refresh and launch in October 2019.

Underpinning the training and development programmes, regular eBulletin and website updates are used to share targeted opportunities and resources. These increased in importance, during the pandemic with the need for connectivity and access to immediate and different advice, guidance and support.

Recognising that the pandemic changed people’s access to communications, the team shifted the emphasis. For example, many museum staff and volunteers working from home, and those on furlough, did not have access to their work email accounts (the accounts with which they had signed up to the mailing list), therefore the emphasis was also placed on web resources and increasing the usability of the website.

The number of mailouts increased during the first lockdown, due to the range of information being shared by the Government and the sector, as people tried to make sense of and navigate the unprecedented circumstances. In addition to these, eBulletin updates dedicated Coronavirus update pages were created covering advice and guidance, information for museums facing closure and reopening, funding and wellbeing. Equality, diversity and inclusion resources were added to support museums respond effectively to Black Lives Matters. A page for hosting recordings of events was added to give greater scope for museums to access training when unable to attend live events.

In numbers this equated to 23 newsletters with 169 organisations, opportunities, projects and programmes promoted, from wellbeing guidance to job adverts.

Although the regular WMMD annual conference was cancelled, the Coffee and Chatter provided new ways for museum staff and volunteers to connect, and to share experiences and ideas on an informal drop-in basis.

*“We have achieved an awful lot of work this past 18 months in our small museum with a lot of guidance from the ... Audit which I found valuable in getting this museum up to standard. The zoom, coffee and chat has helped knowing the problems and opinions of other museums.”*

### **Lace Guild Museum**

During lockdown the Coffee and Chatter sessions proved really useful for many of the sector. The Museum valued the range of topics discussed, including curation, conservation and restoration but, in particular, the peer support and empathy. 'It was so reassuring to see friendly faces and chatter, and to realise – I'm not the only one'.

## 6. Looking forward

*“It’s great to still have an agency like the WMMD as it can feel isolating when there is no-one pulling people and expertise together.”*

Overall, the work of the West Midlands Museums Development team is valued by the museum community. 2019-21 was a period of great change and uncertainty for the sector, which resulted in significant learning about needs, possibilities and understanding about the effectiveness of different components of the programme and options for providing much-needed information, training and support to help museums increase their relevance and effectiveness for their audiences.

### 6.1 What to keep

The evaluation survey and conversations indicated that, aside from the individual success of different programmes, museums in the West Midlands particularly value WMMD for:

- Stable, consistent and reliable presence
- Small Grants: All sizes of museums find these empowering and enable them to take forward new activities
- Relevance of training: Understanding that not all museums are the same (and that places are fully funded)
- Awareness raising through training: Keeping them up to date with progress even if they can’t act immediately.

2019-20 was a year of momentum, building on 2018-19 and the previous programme. Many museums reported their ‘best year ever’, and then the pandemic took the whole country by surprise, stopping ‘normal life’ in its tracks. Its development throughout 2020 and 2021, together with the associated restrictions seemed, at times, almost as unpredictable. At the time of this report, it was still uncertain how the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions and the reopening of venues would impact on visit numbers, to what extent visitors would be comfortable returning, and whether further restrictions might be required in future.

Against this ongoing volatility of the environment, the sense of continuity and consistency of support from the WMMD is greatly valued by different types of museums. That they know where to go for support and to connect with others facing the same challenges is important at a time when it would be even easier to become more isolated. This is not to say that the programme and approach won’t need to evolve again as people get back to ‘normal’. Previous trends have been accelerated (e.g. hybrid digital models) and their impact has yet to be fully understood.

Many museum staff and volunteers used the last year as a time to train and put in place new building blocks towards new ways of working (whether digital, or with different community approaches) as audiences begin to return, re-engage and interact with museums and physical spaces. Over the last 2 years over 50% of evaluation survey respondents have reported some increased confidence or skills in:

- Workforce and volunteering development
- Audience development
- Inclusion and Accessibility
- Interpretation
- Digital.

Revisiting these, as museums get the opportunity to put them into practice, along with testing the revised business models, will help find out what really works, and then enable the design of further development and support to embed.

At a time when the museum workforce is noticeably exhausted, enabling connectivity, helping people keeping in touch and increasing the accessibility of support will be more important than ever.

*“... It is great to see other professionals in the region even if I don't know them. I think WMMD are ... doing an excellent job in offering events like this via zoom - even if the lockdown ends, attendance by Zoom is really helpful as it helps manage travel costs, travel time, and childcare issues.”*

Collaborative solutions, for example brokering and connecting with specific initiatives, such as Kids in Museums, or the collections management with the Collections Trust helps ensure that WMMD continues to play the right and relevant role in the whole museum ecology. This includes ensuring active and regular feedback and minimising duplication, for example cancelling the conference, recognising there were others with free online content at that time. Partnership working and collaboration was already happening before Covid-19, and it is something that should continue and be strengthened.

## **6.2 Emerging areas of need or improvement**

While there is value in continuity of support, it is also increasingly clear that we have not all experienced the same pandemic. Experience was different depending on the type and size of museum and existing audience engagement. Some had most staff furloughed. Shielding was important for some volunteers, who then used this hiatus to review their time commitments. With the remaining staff and volunteers working from home, not everyone had access to museum networks. Others used the time to rethink their offer, plan and develop online engagement.

The distinctiveness of Museum Development support comes from its live understanding of the museums in its areas, the challenges facing them and bridging the distance between museums and potential opportunities. The fast-changing landscape meant that it was impossible to fully meet all expectations. Moving forward, as the restrictions are lifted, managing expectations and relationships will be as important as during the pandemic, to support the further change and responsiveness required by museums.

The online model of support has introduced the possibility of museums being able to access practice and information across the country, or even the World. WMMD has the opportunity to harness and promote the best from elsewhere, and also develop its own areas of specialism, for sharing more widely. It will be even more important to facilitate networks and connections across the area and to ensure support is tailored to a specific West Midlands offer.

As an immediate focus, over the last two years, is that almost 50% evaluation survey respondents have lost confidence or skills in their Governance.

Emerging and Immediate priorities for evaluation survey respondents are:

- Reopening the museum: rebuilding audiences, continuing to adapt programmes and measures to navigate the ongoing unknown Covid-19 environment, and staff training
- Volunteer recruitment succession, training and development: in particular rebuilding volunteer base post lockdown
- Restoring income generation

It will also be important to check in with those who didn't participate over the last year, to reconnect, understand why and ensure any routes to future participation remain open. Similarly, while the vast majority of respondents consider the quality of the programme and support to be good or excellent, attention needs to be paid to understand the small number who had reservations or for who it was not appropriate.

## **6.3 Towards Let's Create**

Museum Development is funded by Arts Council England. *Let's Create*, its 2020-30 Strategy, developed in consultation with the sector and public, sets out the direction of travel for the next

ten years in order to deliver, “A country transformed by culture. Bringing us together, happier, healthier. To excite, inspire, delight. To enrich our lives.”<sup>17</sup>

The priority outcomes are:

- Creative People: Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life,
- Cultural Communities: Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture,
- A Creative & Cultural Country: the cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

Museums are well placed to deliver effectively against these, with the potential to have a deep and lasting effect on local places and the people who live and work there, and to focus investment in the workforce on developing a resilient and thriving sector that, “generates new ideas, works easily and effectively with others, and is adept at developing diverse talent from every community”.

Supporting the outcomes are four principles that investment will be reviewed against:

- Ambition & Quality: Organisations are ambitious, committed to improving the quality of their work,
- Dynamism: Cultural organisations are dynamic and able to respond to challenges,
- Environmental Responsibility: Organisations lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility
- Inclusivity & Relevance: England’s diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture they produce.

WMMD is well placed to support this work, building on and moving to the next stage in its workforce and organisation development programmes such as:

- Strengthening leadership and governance
- Audience and workforce diversity and inclusion
- Collections reimagination and reinterpretation, and
- Supporting museums access Arts Council’s funding opportunities.

Suggested areas of activity to add in to, or increase emphasis on are:

- Climate emergency
- Place-making partnerships and collaboration.

While not part of the 2018-22 funding cycle, as these have been identified as shared sector priorities, it is timely for WMMD to start aligning activity and reflecting them in their planning. Museums are well placed to rise to the challenges and drive forward these priorities and demonstrate their relevance to their communities. Therefore, it is timely to identify how existing activity aligns to the new priorities, and how WMMD can best support their need and ambition, building on the existing success and strengths of the programme.

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<sup>17</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/letscreate)

## Appendix A: Museums in West Midlands

Accredited Museums	Type
<b>Birmingham</b>	
Aston Hall	Independent
Barber Institute of Fine Arts	University
Birmingham Back to Backs	National Trust
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery	Independent
Blakesley Hall	Independent
Lapworth Museum of Geology	University
Museum Collections Centre	Independent
Museum of The Jewellery Quarter	Independent
Newman Brothers at the Coffin Works	Independent
The Pen Museum	Independent
Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham	University
Royal Birmingham Society of Artists Permanent Collection (RBSA)	Independent
Sarehole Mill	Independent
Selly Manor Museum	Independent
Soho House Museum	Independent
Thinktank	Independent
Winterbourne House and Gardens	University
<b>Black Country</b>	
Bantock House Museum	Local authority
Bilston Craft Gallery and Museum	Local authority
Black Country Living Museum	Independent
Haden Hill House Museum	Local authority
The Lace Guild	Independent
Locksmith's House	Independent
Oak House Museum	Local authority
The New Art Gallery Walsall	Local authority
Walsall Leather Museum	Local authority
Wednesbury Museum and Art Gallery	Local authority
Wightwick Manor & Gardens	National Trust
Wolverhampton Art Gallery	Local authority
<b>Herefordshire</b>	
Berrington Hall	National Trust
Black and White House Museum	Local authority
Brockhampton Estate	National Trust
Croft Castle	National Trust
Hereford Cider Museum	Independent
Hereford Museum and Art Gallery	Local authority
Herefordshire Light Infantry Regimental Museum	Independent
Herefordshire Museum Resource Centre	Local authority
Kington Museum and History Centre	Independent
Leominster Museum	Independent
Waterworks Museum - Hereford	Independent
<b>Shropshire</b>	
Acton Scott Working Farm Museum	Local authority
Attingham Park	National Trust
Benthall Hall	National Trust
Blists Hill Victorian Town	Independent
Boscobel House	English Heritage

Bridgnorth Northgate Museum	Independent
Broseley Pipeworks	Independent
Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron	Independent
Coalport China Museum	Independent
Darby Houses (Rosehill and Dale House)	Independent
Dudmaston Hall	National Trust
House on Crutches Museum Collection	Independent
Jackfield Tile Museum	Independent
Library and Archives, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust	Independent
Ludlow Museum	Local authority
Much Wenlock Museum	Local authority
Museum of the Post Office in the Community	Independent
Royal Air Force Museum Cosford (RAF)	National
Shropshire Museums' Resources Centre	Local authority
Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery	Local authority
Soldiers of Shropshire	Independent
Sunnycroft	National Trust
Whitchurch Heritage Centre	Local authority
Wroxeter Roman Site and Museum	English Heritage
<b>Staffordshire</b>	
Ancient High House	Local authority
Brampton Museum	Local authority
Chasewater Railway Museum	Independent
Claymills Victorian Pumping Station	Independent
Erasmus Darwin House	Independent
Etruria Industrial Museum	Local authority
Ford Green Hall	Independent
Gladstone Pottery Museum	Local authority
Izaak Walton's Cottage	Local authority
Lichfield Museum at St. Mary's in the Square	Independent
Moseley Old Hall	National Trust
Museum of Cannock Chase	Independent
Potteries Museum and Art Gallery	Local authority
The Raven Mason Collection	Independent
Redfern's Cottage: Museum of Uttoxeter Life	Independent
Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum	Local authority
Stafford Castle	Local authority
Staffordshire County Museum	Local authority
The Staffordshire Regiment Museum	Independent
Staffordshire Yeomanry Museum	Independent
Tamworth Castle	Local authority
Wall Roman Site and Museum (Letocetum Site and Museum)	English Heritage
Wedgwood Museum	Independent
Weston Park	Independent
<b>Warwickshire</b>	
Anne Hathaway's Cottage	Independent
Baddesley Clinton Hall	National Trust
British Motor Museum	Independent
Charlecote Park	National Trust
Compton Verney	Independent
Coventry Transport Museum	Independent
Hall's Croft	Independent
The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum	Independent
Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum	Local authority

Mary Arden's House and Shakespeare's Countryside Museum	Independent
Midland Air Museum	Independent
New Place / Nash's House	Independent
Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery	Local authority
Packwood House	National Trust
Roman Alcester	Independent
Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum (Royal Warwickshire)	Independent
Royal Shakespeare Company Collection	Independent
Rugby Art Gallery and Museum	Local authority
Shakespeare's Birthplace and The Shakespeare Centre	Independent
The Lunt Roman Fort	Independent
University of Warwick Art Collection	University
Upton House and Gardens	National Trust
Warwickshire Museum	Local authority
Warwickshire Yeomanry Museum	Independent
<b>Worcestershire</b>	
Almonry Heritage Centre	Local authority
Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings	Independent
Bewdley Museum	Local authority
The Commandery	Local authority
Droitwich Spa Heritage and Information Centre	Local authority
The Firs	National Trust
George Marshall Medical Museum	Independent
Greyfriars House and Garden	National Trust
Hanbury Hall & Gardens	National Trust
Kidderminster Railway Museum	Independent
Malvern Museum of Local History	Independent
The Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire)	Independent
Tenbury Wells Museum and History Group	Independent
The Transport Museum, Wythall	Independent
Tudor House Museum	Independent
Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery	Local authority
Worcestershire County Museum	Local authority
Worcestershire Museum of Freemasonry	Independent
The Worcestershire Yeomanry Cavalry Museum	Independent



## Museums working towards Accreditation

Broadway Museum and Art Gallery

Dudley Museum

Marton Museum of Country Bygones

Museum of Carpet

The Museum of Royal Worcester

Mythstories

The Peel Society

Red House Glass Cone Museum

Statfold Narrow Gauge Museum

Stourbridge Glass Museum

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/accreditation-scheme/about-accreditation#section-4>

## National Portfolio Museums

Type

Birmingham Museums Trust

3

Black Country Living Museum Trust

2

British Motor Industry Heritage Trust

1

Compton Verney House Trust

1

Culture Coventry

2

Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

2

Lapworth Museum of Geology

1

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

1

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-2018-22/more-data-2018-22>

## Appendix B: Evaluation conversations

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### Organisation

The Almonry

Barber Institute of Fine Arts

Brampton Museum

Coventry Culture Trust

The Lace Guild Museum

Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum

Malvern Museum of Local History

Museum of Carpet

Pen Museum, Birmingham

Rugby Museum and Art Gallery

Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum

Selly Manor Museum

Soldiers of Shropshire

Waterworks Museum - Hereford

## Appendix C: WMMD team

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## Appendix D: List of training sessions

2019-20	
9 April 2019	Call to Adventure - Session 3
11 April 2019	Digital Storytelling
17 April 2019	In the Spotlight: Handling the Media
3 May 2019	Documentation Basics
7 May 2019	Banish the Backlog 2019-20 (Cohort 3, meeting 1)
22 May 2019	In the Spotlight: Interviews
18 June 2019	In the Spotlight: Live Television
27 June 2019	Collections Knowledge Cafe: The Wood from the Trees
3 July 2019	Collections Knowledge Cafe: Photographing Collections
15 August 2019	Project Grant 1-1 conversations with Wendy Parry
15 August 2019	Project Grant Presentation Wendy Parry
5 September 2019	Banish the Backlog general meeting (cohorts 1,2 and 3)
5 September 2019	Introduction to using data
19 September 2019	Diversity Champions 2019 Event 1
24 September 2019	A-Z of Accreditation
25 September 2019	Carbon Literacy
1 October 2019	Field worker training (am)
1 October 2019	Field worker training (pm)
9 October 2019	Business Planning
10 October 2019	Diversity Champions 2019 Event 2
17 October 2019	How to be a Family Friendly Museum
18 October 2019	Collections Knowledge Cafe: Copyright and Rights Management
21 October 2019	Enriching the Record - Oral History Training
24 October 2019	Open to All 2019: Welcoming Neurodivergent Visitors launch event
30 October 2019	Maximising Earned Income
5 November 2019	Making the Case? The future of collections and collecting in museums
7 November 2019	Diversity Champions 2019 Event 3
19 November 2019	Evaluation - Measuring what matters
28 November 2019	Accounting and Finance for Small Charities
4 December 2019	Media Masterclass
5 December 2019	Diversity Champions 2019 Event 4
5 December 2019	Welcoming All Customers
12 December 2019	Using visitor analysis to produce an audience development plan
21 January 2020	Banish the Backlog 3rd Cohort (2nd Meeting)
23 January 2020	A-Z of Accreditation (Access in Focus)
29 January 2020	Volunteers 'Exceeding Visitor Expectations'
4 February 2020	Good Practice in Volunteer Management
6 February 2020	Digital Literacy
11 February 2020	Exceeding Visitor Expectations 2020
12 February 2020	Learning through Drama: The Narrative Immersion Approach
12 February 2020	Good Housekeeping: Integrated Pest Management (2 days)
25 February 2020	Confident Bid Writing
2 March 2020	Revealing Hidden Histories Sharing Event

## 2020-21

16 April 2020	Banish the Backlog Catch-up
21 April 2020	Writing an Emergency Funding Bid - Webinar
22 April 2020	Managing your workforce during Covid-19 pandemic - webinar
30 April 2020	Maximising Earned Income
06 May 2020	Engaging your audiences during lockdown - webinar
29 July 2020	Accreditation Mentor catch up
5 August 2020	Supporting the Wellbeing of your Workforce during Periods of Uncertainty and Change
12 August 2020	Family Friendly Reopening
17 August 2020	Banish the Backlog Catch-Up
26 August 2020	Digital Access and Inclusion for your Visitors: producing content
21 September 2020	Documentation Procedural Manuals
29 September 2020	Maximising Earned Income; 1 of 2
30 September 2020	Creating Family Friendly Interactions in the New Normal
1 October 2020	Maximising Earned Income; 2 of 2
6 October 2020	Exceeding Expectations
13 October 2020	Handling Challenges
20 October 2020	Welcoming All
22 October 2020	Audience Champion Virtual session 1
28 October 2020	Race and Ethnicity training
5 November 2020	Business Planning in Challenging Times
18 November 2020	Developing an Equality Action Plan 2020/21
24 November 2020	Introduction to Accreditation
25 November 2020	Completing an Equality Action Plan 2020/21
26 November 2020	Audience Champion Virtual session 2
8 December 2020	Collection Essentials - Stop the Rot - The 10 Agents of Decay in Museum Collections
12 January 2021	Collection Essentials - Back to Basics - Assessing Collection Risks for Emergency Plans (Part 1+2)
20 January 2021	Chairing Effective Online Board Meetings
26 January 2021	Collection Essentials - Hazards in Museum Collections (Part 1+2)
26 January 2021	MDN EDI Training Session 1
28 January 2021	Audience Champion Virtual session 3
3 February 2021	Lunchtime Learning: Managing Volunteers
9 February 2021	MDN EDI Training Session 2
10 February 2021	Lunchtime Learning; Recruiting Volunteers
17 February 2021	Lunchtime Learning; Retaining Volunteers
17 February 2021	Banish the Backlog catch-ups
24 February 2021	An Introduction to Accounting and Financial Management for Small Charities
25 February 2021	Race and Ethnicity Feb 2021
2 March 2021	MDN EDI Training Session 3
9 March 2021	Family Friendly Audit - Sharing Event
9 March 2021	Every Object Tells a Story: Developing Confidence in Talking about Our Collections Online (Part 1&2)
11 March 2021	Business Planning in Challenging Times
17 March 2021	Advanced Accounting and Financial Management for Small Charities

## Appendix E: Delivery against ACE Goals and agreed targets

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	2019-20	2020-21
Accreditation	5 Met or Exceeded 4 Below target or delayed	8 Met or Exceeded 2 Below target or delayed
Goal 1: Collections	8 Met or Exceeded 3 Below target or delayed	3 Met or Exceeded 7 Below target or delayed
Goal 2: Audiences	8 Met or Exceeded 1 Below target or delayed	7 Met or Exceeded 2 Below target or delayed
Goal 3: Resilience	6 Met or Exceeded 7 Below target or delayed	7 Met or Exceeded 5 Below target or delayed
Goal 4: Leadership, Workforce & Diversity	4 Met or Exceeded 3 Below target or delayed	5 Met or Exceeded 2 Below target or delayed
Goal 5: Children and Young People	4 Met or Exceeded 2 Below target or delayed	2 Met or Exceeded 4 Below target or delayed