

**Hampshire Solent Museums LAINet Meeting  
Curriculum Change and Museums  
Tuesday 29 April 2014 at SEARCH, Gosport**

**Museum overview – responses to curriculum change  
Feedback on Coming of Age: new thinking in museum learning, 23 January 2014  
Tracy Teasdale, Learning Officer for Portsmouth Museums**

**Introduction**

*Coming of Age: new thinking in museum learning* was a one-day Museum Practice seminar organised by the Museums Association in partnership with GEM (Group for Education in Museums). It aimed to look at how museums can ensure that learning remains at the forefront of their offer in this time of unprecedented changes to the educational landscape.

**Nick Winterbotham, Chair of GEM**

**What does the new curriculum in England mean for museums?**

This positive and provocative presentation set the tone for the day.

It centred on the basic question: how realistic is it to frame a museum's output around the curriculum, particularly the history curriculum?

Answer: it isn't! Museums don't exist to teach children the National Curriculum.

Follow up questions:

- What do we know about learning in museums?

Museums are good at the affective domain. They can affect people's feelings, influence their attitudes and perspectives, equip them with learning skills, engage them in experiences that are sociable, inclusive and enjoyable and inspire them to write, draw, make, find out...

See the Inspiring Learning for All or ILfA framework with its Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) and Generic Social Outcomes (GSOs):

[www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk](http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk)

- What do we know about teachers?

They receive very little training on working with objects.

- What do we know about schools?

47% of English pupils don't have to follow the National Curriculum (Academies, independent schools etc)

## Recommendations

- Don't panic!
- Talk with teachers
- Work with teachers to co-create new strategies
- Relate it to bits of the curriculum if you have to
- Be clear about the benefits of working with museums
- Note that the new history curriculum gives teachers some scope and freedom to look at local topics
- Spot the opportunities for adventurous and effective engagement.

### **Anra Kennedy, Contents & Partnerships Director at Culture 24**

#### **How can museums make their digital assets more accessible to schools?**

Culture24 helps museums and galleries connect with audiences online:

[www.culture24.org.uk](http://www.culture24.org.uk)

Schools, teachers and children are better equipped than ever before to use technology to support learning and access digital resources. Museums have an amazing opportunity to open up collections online to enable people to use them as inspiration. Anra argued that digital assets are a separate, different but equally valid resource to the real thing and museums must keep up and be part of the learning revolution.

She made reference to:

[www.show.me.uk](http://www.show.me.uk)

A showcase for museum digital games, due to be re-launched in May 2014.

Connecting Collections – an Arts Council England (ACE) funded project to make digital collections accessible for 7 – 14 year olds.

[www.culturestreet.org.uk](http://www.culturestreet.org.uk)

Linked to Arts Award.

Users want easy access to digital resources.

Museums need to -

Ensure our digital content is fit for purpose:

- Quick to find
- Accessible
- Clearly written with relevant contextual information

- Bite sized
- High quality, high resolution images - users want to be able to zoom in, download and view clearly on whatever equipment they are using
- Safe and age appropriate – be aware of sensitivities e.g. school fire walls

Create easy to follow pathways to, through & beyond content:

- No collection represents the whole story. Don't be afraid to link users to other websites, including other museums.

Raise the profile of our digital content as a whole:

- Tell people that we have material online!

**Adam Goldwater, Learning Innovations Team, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums and Phd researcher at Newcastle University**

**How good can we be?**

Adam Goldwater described the development and implementation of the Quality Framework at Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM), *How good can we be?* A big process with a long timeline (20013 – 2014) which looked at the quality of learning across venues.

Aims:

- To identify which elements have most influence on the quality of learning
- To isolate these factors so they can be managed and applied routinely across the service
- To build the capacity of venues and staff to develop, deliver and promote a cultural learning offer of consistently high quality.

There were three phases to the process:

- Review what they are doing
- Reflect on their professional practice, including a Peer Review by learning staff from Leeds Museums & Galleries and evaluation by teachers
- Define their vision and strategy, including Peer Review, involvement of TWAM staff beyond the learning team and the introduction of an annual learning strategy day.

**Tim Desmond, Chief Executive of the Galleries of Justice Museum in Nottingham and the National Centre for Citizenship & the Law**  
**Education Syndicates as a method of delivering museum learning**

Education Syndicates encourage museums to join together in thematic or geographical groups to have their education services delivered by a central organisation.

Examples include the Public Legal Syndicate in London at the Royal Courts of Justice and the UK Supreme Court and the Civil Justice Centre in Manchester.

Advantages:

- It addresses the issue of schools finding it difficult to locate information about museums and their learning offer by creating a one-stop-shop with shared marketing and a centralised booking service
- It ensures consistency of quality – which gives schools confidence and encourages more visits
- It can reduce costs for participating museums
- It provides opportunities for volunteers and students to gain vocational skills by working as interns.

He accepted that having lots of Chief Executives round a table can make decision making difficult and that the idea of handing over responsibility for the learning website to an IT team can be challenging.

He mentioned discussions in Brighton & Hove in which the local museums found that they have lots in common and arranged to share skills and resources and promote them to schools.

**Sue Davies, Head of Learning & Audience Development at Leeds Museums & Galleries**

**The opportunities of the new curriculum for museums and galleries**

Sue Davies asked if the National Curriculum has created order and testing at the expense of developing creative, adaptable, socially adept and personally engaged young people. She pointed out that we now have a generation of teachers who are used to teaching in a blinkered, single subject way and argued that what society actually needs is a broad curriculum that focuses on exploration, discovery and creativity. All things that museums are perfectly positioned to encourage and support!

The new curriculum gives schools the chance to develop their own curriculum around it so how can museums make the most difference?

- Understand the local education landscape e.g. the different types of schools
- Familiarise ourselves with the new curriculum
- Work in partnership with schools – involve teachers in our response to the new curriculum and remember that not everything needs to change
- Get involved in training
- Be proactive and remember that we are the experts at what we do.

As part of recent research Sue asked teachers what they value most about museums. It wasn't the collections or buildings, it was the staff!

### **Ronan Brindley, Head of Learning at Manchester Art Gallery** **The importance of continuity in museum & gallery education**

In 2013 / 14 there were over 400,000 visits to Manchester Art Gallery.  
Statistics for educational activities:

- 39% families (20,200)
- 34% schools & colleges (17,200)
- 27% learning for life (13,900)

Ronan Brindley argued that continuity in museum and gallery education is as important as responding to external changes. He also reminded us that there are audiences other than schools to work with and posed a series of questions:

- Do we know enough about the demographics of our city or location?
- Do we know enough about our learning audiences?
- Are there any new learning audiences we can work with?
- Can we adjust our delivery to suit the needs of audiences e.g. after school clubs, evening openings?
- Are there new models for interaction e.g. museum take-overs?
- Do we know our own strengths?
- Would our audiences recognise these strengths?

His key recommendation is to know your strengths and shout about them and to maximise the potential of your gallery or museum as a social space.

## **Conclusion – what were the main messages I took away from the seminar?**

- Talk with teachers and keep up to date with what's happening in your local schools
- Read the new curriculum and look for gaps and opportunities
- Work in partnership with teachers to develop your museum's response to the new curriculum
- Be clear about your strengths and USPs and shout about them
- Be bold, innovative and willing to take risks
- Focus on quality and creativity
- Remember that museums do not exist to deliver the National Curriculum
- Remember that museum learning is not just about schools.

Tracy Teasdale  
Learning Officer, Portsmouth Museums

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