**Joint Response to the Select Committee Inquiry on the Social Impact of Participation in Culture and Sport**

**Background**

1. The Museums Association (MA) is a membership organisation representing and supporting museums and people who work for them, throughout the UK. Our membership of over 8000 includes all types of museums, from small volunteer-run local museums to large national institutions and people working in all types of roles from directors to trainees. Founded in 1889, the MA was the world’s first professional body for museums. We lead thinking in UK museums with initiatives such as Collections for the Future, Museums 2020 and, most recently, Museums Change Lives. We receive no regular public funding, and we do not wish to do so. For more information about the Museums Association, see our website: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/home>
2. The National Museum Directors' Council represents the leaders of the UK's national collections and major regional museums.  Our members are the national and major regional museums in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Archives and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. NMDC acts as an advocate on behalf of members and their collective priorities and provides them with a valuable forum for discussion and debate and an opportunity to share information and work collaboratively.  While our members are funded by government, the NMDC is an independent, non-governmental organisation.  For more information about NMDC and our activity see our website: [www.nationalmuseums.org.uk](http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk)

**Museums and Social Impact**

1. Museums are perhaps not widely perceived as agents of social change. However, museums in the UK are playing an increasingly active role in providing support, care, training and lifelong learning in the communities they serve. Museums use their collections, spaces and expertise to enhance people’s wellbeing and life chances by engaging with visitors and users at the personal and community level. They are increasing their social impact by developing new ways of working with audiences and communities: growing public participation, co-production of museum work and events, and sharing collections and knowledge in ways that can change people’s perspectives and wellbeing.
2. Museums of all sizes, with collections ranging from fine art to social history, are taking up this challenge – often in partnership with community groups, charities and public sector organisations. This type of work helps museums be more sustainable and the public benefits it generates underline the continuing importance of museums as a public service.
3. A recent survey[[1]](#footnote-1) conducted by the Museums Association confirms that more museums than ever are targeting engagement work towards specific groups and communities in order to increase their social impact.
4. The survey found that a large proportion (74%) of museums in the UK work directly with local community groups. More than half work regularly with museum friends or supporters associations (59%) and youth groups (55%). Large percentages of museums work with health and wellbeing providers (46%) and disability groups (47%). Smaller but significant proportions of respondents said they had worked with black, Asian and ethnic minority communities (23%), environmental groups or campaigns (18%), LGBTQ+ groups (19%), refugees or asylum seekers (15%) and gender equality groups (12%). The percentage of museums saying they work with many of these groups has increased significantly since the Museums Survey 2017.
5. The Museums Association has highlighted the social impact of museum through its Museums Change Lives campaign[[2]](#footnote-2), and NMDC has set out many of the benefits that museums bring to communities through its Museums Matter publication[[3]](#footnote-3). Both documents have a number of useful case studies which may be of further interest to the work of the Committee. We have highlighted a number of key examples below with recommendations for future government support.

**Health and Wellbeing Partnerships**

1. Partnerships between museums and health and wellbeing organisations have grown rapidly in recent years and have led to positive outcomes for patients, communities, museums and health organisations. For example, many museums now operate programmes for people with dementia and their carers. One of the highest profile programmes is the House of Memories at National Museums Liverpool, which supports carers and caring organisations through a range of events and object handling sessions (case study below). It is funded by local Health Trusts and Care Commissioning Groups[[4]](#footnote-4). The National Alliance for Museums Health and Wellbeing has been set up to advance these partnerships and encourage other museums to pursue opportunities in the health and wellbeing field[[5]](#footnote-5).

**Case Study: House of Memories at National Museums Liverpool**

House of Memories provides health, social care and housing professionals and family carers with a training programme to increase dementia awareness and understanding based on the museum’s collection and role at the heart of the city’s life. To date more than 11,000 people have undertaken the training.

The ambition to make this services available in every care setting across the country is already beginning to be realised with roll out across the UK.

• National Museums Liverpool is now generating international interest, with the first development in the USA in 2016 with the Minnesota Historical Society and interest from Singapore, Japan and Taiwan.

• As the only cultural organisation to be cited in the Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia 2020, the House of Memories programme has grown to become an important example of the added value that cultural organisations can bring to public services.

• Following external evaluation, NML estimates that a total of £12.6m social value was created in the year following the training programme.

More information is available here: <http://houseofmemories.co.uk/>

1. Museums take a broad view of wellbeing and many have also engaged with training and support for young and unemployed people. Museums have delivered apprenticeships – both formal and informal – in order to help people into training and work. A notable success story is the Scottish Maritime Museum’s Boatbuilding School (case study below).

**Case Study: Scottish Maritime Museum – Scottish Boat Building School**

The Scottish Boat Building School teaches trainees – some of whom are young offenders, long-term unemployed or facing other personal challenges – basic woodworking skills that are not only transferable to the wider workplace but are also used to return older vessels to the water or improve displays in the museum. Repairs carried out on private boats also boost the museum’s commercial arm, helping the project to become self-sustainable. Working in tandem with local agencies, the project markedly improves the self-confidence of the trainees, the vast majority of whom have gone into further employment. More information here: <https://www.scottishmaritimemuseum.org/scot-boat-building-school>

1. We believe that strategic funds to support partnership working across government agencies and local authorities to deliver on specific policy goals (such as the Prime Minister’s Challenge on Dementia) are an effective and targeted use of public investment which allow museums to develop creative and participative responses to health and social challenges, often in partnership with the NHS, social care providers or charities. This sort of funding is particularly valuable to museums whose fixed costs (maintaining buildings, providing public access to collections) can make it difficult to find space in budgets to begin this sort of work.
2. We believe that it is important that museums and the wider culture sector should be given due consideration in health and wellbeing planning, including through local authorities’ Joint Strategic Needs Assessments. There is still scope for greater information sharing amongst services about how the cultural sector can work effectively with NHS and local authority services.

**Place-Making**

1. The contribution that museums make to ‘place-making’ was recognised in the government’s recent White Paper on Culture. Museums are rooted locally and provide a sense of place through their activities within and outwith the museum building. Museums can play a key part in making people want to live, work, visit or invest in a place.

**Case Study: Manchester Museums at the Heart of the Northern Powerhouse**

Manchester’s cultural sector, including Manchester City Galleries, Manchester Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry and The Whitworth, are central to the national and international reputation of the city as a vibrant, creative and exciting place. Culture has been central to the development of the Northern Powerhouse, and the collaborative way in which museums already work across Greater Manchester ensures that the benefits of inward investment are felt beyond the central Manchester postcodes.

1. We believe that civic museums should be fully represented in Local Enterprise Partnerships and culture should be fully integrated into town or regional economic plans – such as the newly devolved city regions in England – to enable museums to play an important role in local development and place-making.
2. Museums also play a key role in developing people’s sense of place and pride in where they live. They are often well placed to act as a focal point for community engagement and understanding around local issues. They can be a driving force in changing the way that people perceive where they live. Luton’s Museum Makers are an excellent example of this (case study below.)

**Case Study: Wardown Park Museum – Luton Change Makers**

Ranging from retirees to students, and schoolchildren to young professionals, the Museum Makers are a volunteer team working with Luton Culture to help transform Wardown Park Museum into a brand new cultural attraction while making new friends and learning new skills along the way. The Museum Makers programme was announced to the town through a viral video Luton-based version of the song ‘Happy’ by Pharrell Williams, which was designed to make people in the town feel a sense of pride in where they lived and to engage positively with the town’s culture and history. The video, which has over 160,000 views on YouTube, can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKcU-iZFsRg>

**Museums Inspiring Debate and Reflection**

1. Museums are well placed to promote debate and reflection amongst audiences on some of the key issues and challenges that we face in the modern world. Museum collections – and expert interpretation of them – allow issues that are relevant to modern audiences to be raised in a safe space, supported by accurate information. It is important to note that expertise on a subject often comes from audiences and partner groups, as well as from museum curatorial staff, and museums are increasingly co-producing or co-curating exhibitions and events with members of the communities they serve. This allows them to develop exhibitions and events that are relevant to different audiences and to increase engagement in communities with low levels of cultural participation. The case studies below offer good examples of this in practice.

**Case Study: Exceptional and Extraordinary at the University of Leicester**

Four disabled artists have used the resources of eight of the UK’s most renowned medical museums to create artworks that aim to examine public attitudes towards difference. The Exceptional and Extraordinary project, initiated and led by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester, comprises new commissions by Francesca Martinez, Julie McNamara, David Hevey and Deaf Men Dancing which feature comedy, dance, live performance, film and digital media.

“Our research shows that museums are trusted institutions that can host and, importantly, influence debates about these kinds of issues,” says Richard Sandell, professor of Museum Studies. “Collections and the stories that they hold can be especially powerful in engaging visitors to think – and to think differently – about difference.”

More information here: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/exceptional-an>

**Case Study: The Past is Now at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery**

The Past is Now is an exhibition currently on display in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery which explores Birmingham’s relationship to the British Empire.

It was co-curated with Birmingham based graphic designer, Abeera Kamran; artivist, Aliyah Hasinah; writer, Mariam Khan; cultural activist, Sara Myers; textile designer, Shaheen Kasmani, writer and researcher Sumaya Kassim.

The exhibition challenges the typical colonial narrative used to present the history of the British Empire. By focusing on a few key events and themes, the exhibition examines the museum’s own bias in telling difficult narratives and explores other perspectives, which have been historically misrepresented.

This exhibition is part of the new Story Lab gallery. Story Lab is a space that will test different storylines and ways of creating museum displays, encouraging visitors to interact, feedback and engage in conversations with the exhibition makers and with each other. The feedback will be used to determine future partnerships and exhibitions in the gallery.

More information is available here: <http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/bmag/whats-on/the-past-is-now-birmingham-and-the-british-empire>

1. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1244881> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/museums-matter/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learning/projects/house-of-memories/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)