

Museums Association

Submission to Arts Council England

May 2011

1 Introduction. The need for strategy

1.1 What can the Museums Association offer to ACE?

- The Museums Association is the only organisation that represents the full range of museums and galleries and people who work for them. We have over 6,000 institutional and individual members representing all types of museums from the largest nationals to small independents and everything in between. We have an exceptional track record in setting strategic direction for museums and encouraging new thinking and improved practice.
- We encourage you to be bold and future-focused in your thinking at this stage. Our discussions with people in the sector at many levels lead us to believe there is a real hunger for a new direction and impetus for the sector, with a clear rationale for investment.
- We also encourage you to build on your recent experience with the new National Portfolio and to bring useful lessons learned from that process to inform the future funding of the museum sector.
- What is suggested here differs from MLA's 'New Renaissance' proposal. It is simpler, clearer in its aims and structures and can be more transparent. It is also less risky, it can enable easier convergence with ACE's national portfolio approach in future and may mean less disruption than would be caused by implementing New Renaissance. However, it could mean cuts in anticipated funding for some larger non-national museums. It will require advocacy to both decision-makers and the sector. We are keen to support you publicly and to work with you in this critical transition stage.
- We believe strongly in the need for a national strategy for museums that can fully inform your medium- and long-term investment and decisions. We recognise that such a strategy can not be finalised before you invite museums to apply for funding for 2012-2015. However, we strongly believe in the need for a strategic direction to guide your decision making and we believe that an initial strategic framework can be in place to inform your decisions about museum funding in autumn 2011.
- Leadership for developing a national strategy should be inclusive, accountable and transparent. The MA is keen to work with you and to take a lead on this.
- The MA is the only organisation which can represent the whole of the museum sector. With your support, we would seek to work closely with AIM, UMG, NMDC and others in developing such a strategy.
- In the meantime, we want to work closely with you to produce the initial strategic framework that will enable you to make rigorous and transparent decisions about funding this year. This initial strategic framework can in particular help you finalise a portfolio of museums which is balanced geographically and demographically, by audience and by type; and delivering against the goals which you are developing.

1.2 What assumptions underpin our thinking?

- We have focused our response at this stage on Renaissance as the main ‘investment fund’ for non-national museums – although, as stated above, our ambition is the development of a national strategy.
- We understand that the framework and goals which ACE is developing will become the key criteria for funding. We strongly believe that these should encompass and express wide and active engagement with and participation in culture for public benefit, building on the very considerable advances and achievements in learning and social action of museums and galleries.
- This is a short-term (three-year) transition, after which we would anticipate a greater integration within ACE’s national portfolio.
- Any strategy for England should recognise and respect the autonomy of other nations.
- ACE should not accept the principles of ‘New Renaissance’. A clear rationale and justification for a small number of ‘core’ museums was not provided; the approach is not tested; and it has only very limited buy in from the sector. The external context is now very different from the context when the review of Renaissance was undertaken. This is a fresh opportunity for ACE and for the sector to do something radically different that better meets the needs of audiences and of the whole sector.
- In particular, the MA believes that funding should be simplified with a single funding stream within which awards can be made. It does not recommend the creation of a small number of ‘core’ museums and a ‘Challenge Fund’.
- Within the context of a national strategy for the museum sector, your funding and influence can catalyse a greater integration of national museums with the rest of the sector, recognising that local museums are best placed to identify and meet local needs.
- We do not believe that ACE should take responsibility for running organisations.

2 Proposed future direction for funding for non-national museums

Many of these points are expanded further on the following pages

- 2.1 The key purpose of ACE funding and support for non-national museums should be to improve the impact and public benefit of museums and galleries, so museums and galleries give opportunities for inspiration, learning and enjoyment for the full range of people in England.
- 2.2 ACE investment should prioritise impact and public benefit, not infrastructure. ACE should offer investment to bring public benefit and impact, not subsidy for institutions. Any support for infrastructure must have a strong and direct link to public impact.
- 2.3 ACE's investment should be focused on outcomes for people in defined areas.
- 2.4 After 7 years of investment in the major regional museums and collections, ACE now should broaden the investment 'portfolio' and work with partners to strengthen the museum sector more widely in order to maximise impact and benefit. ACE should not concentrate funds on a small group of 'core' museums.
- 2.5 The focus of any investment should not be on institutional improvement per se but on transformation and resilience to improve impact.
- 2.6 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation should be robust and non-bureaucratic; it should focus on quality and impact of services as well as numbers; it should include co-ordination to enable comparability and consistency of data and evidence nationally; it should encourage honest reporting and shared reflection to learn from difficulties as well as successes.
- 2.7 Depending on the final version of ACE's overarching goals for museums and libraries, museum applicants could be asked to sign up to all goals – public purpose and deep audience engagement are not optional goals for museums.
- 2.8 Investment should be holistic, around core purpose, across the whole organisation or across a coalition of organisations serving a defined area, and supporting the whole purpose of the organisation(s). Investment should not be for discrete or additional 'projects'.
- 2.9 Investment should encourage coalitions where they can strengthen impact and reach, and drive efficiencies in the defined area.
- 2.10 Organisations in an area should support each other in delivery and development.
- 2.11 Investment should allow for the broadening of 'museum' services and cultural provision beyond buildings where it can deliver strong reach and impact.
- 2.12 Sector-wide programmes should be driven by the need to help museums and galleries achieve the overarching goals of public benefit, not institutional need, and by recognition that the aim of all investment is achieving impact in defined geographical/social/demographic areas.
- 2.13 ACE's own development function should encompass encouraging coalitions and partnerships, stimulating provision in 'cold spots' and broad sectoral programmes

In a little more detail...

2.1 The purpose of ACE funding: Inspiration, learning and enjoyment for the full range of people:

According to the Museums Association definition of museums, they exist in order to 'enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment'. The entire purpose of ACE funding for museums and galleries should be so that museums can improve the opportunities they offer to the full range of people in England.

2.2 ACE should prioritise impact and public benefit, not infrastructure – investment, not subsidy:

The long-term goal of funding should be that of a good quality (or even excellent) museum and gallery service for the full range of people in a defined area (see 2.3 below), to which all institutions in that area contribute.

The confusion which has run throughout the Renaissance programme has been between the twin ambitions of supporting ailing regional museums, and transforming the sector's impact. The latter should be the priority: ACE should offer investment to bring public benefit and impact, not subsidy for institutions.

A museum's 'asset' of collections and buildings will continue to be owned, managed and maintained by the host organisation: ACE's funding should be to increase impact and public benefit that the museum creates from its assets.

HLF is the main funder for refreshing and renewing museums assets, such as redisplay, rebuilding and acquisition. HLF also supports learning and participation. In setting strategy ACE needs to work closely with HLF and recognise its central role.

2.3 Investment should be focused on impact in defined areas, not institutions:

Funding bids should be specific about defining the area in which there will be impact and public benefit. These areas will normally be geographically, socially or demographically defined – for example to engage all audiences in a defined geographic area or to engage throughout England with a traditionally underrepresented audience group.

With the demise of regional government and regional development agencies, it is no longer the case that the region is the obvious geographic unit. This means there is a need for those bidding for funding to explicitly define a coherent area of impact.

2.4 A broad portfolio of investment to strengthen the museums sector in order to maximise impact and benefit:

Renaissance has hitherto encompassed a wide range of programmes of activity, but its primary focus and investment has been in the hub museums.

We would like to see a broader portfolio which not only includes the ‘great flagship organisations’ and ‘iconic’ venues but as with ACE’s national portfolio also includes many others, always - as stated above - focusing on impact rather than institutions per se.

In particular, we do not support the concept of a small number of ‘core’ museums. We do not believe that there is widespread support in the sector for the idea of ‘core’ museums as described in the ‘New Renaissance’ proposal, which has not been widely discussed in the sector and is in fact rather little known. Furthermore, the core museum model is risky and untested. It was never piloted by MLA, as proposed in 2010.

Based on the figures for the funding of national portfolio organisations, which also supports very substantial national organisations, a very superficial calculation for the museum sector suggests that £30m+ per annum would allow ACE to fund at least 70 museums or consortia. We are not convinced that there is any merit in distinguishing some ‘core’ ACE-funded museums from others that are, presumably, ‘non-core’. This approach does not appear to have been taken with ACE’s national portfolio, so there seems little reason to apply it to museum funding.

Furthermore, we think that there are merits in a single, simple main stream of funds for museums. There appears to be little other than unnecessary confusion and tension to come from separate ‘core’ and ‘challenge’ funding.

It may be that from time to time additional targeted time-limited funding may be worth considering for areas of strategic importance not met by other funding sources such as HLF. Also see 2.12 on sector-wide programmes.

It may be appropriate that all museums in receipt of, say, over £500,000 per year should be expected to be responsive to requests for advice, development support and partnership from the wider sector to maximise benefit of their skills and knowledge.

2.5 The focus of investment should not be improvement per se:

Improvement, transformation and/or capacity and capability building should always be driven by public impact and benefit. In the past, there has been willingness to fund ‘back of house’ work with an assumption that it will lead to public benefit but without any clear plan for creating direct public benefit.

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they are capable of delivering the impact and offering value for money in this. This might, for example, require them to demonstrate that they are open to constructive criticism from others, which might include peer review of their public impact and benefit, and that they are actively engaged in processes of continuous improvement. It should also require them to demonstrate how they will build on and learn from evaluation. They should take full responsibility for their own holistic organisational development (with any necessary external support) and not be asked to go through a ‘checklist’ approach to improvement.

2.6 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting should be robust and non-bureaucratic; it should emphasise quality and impact of services as well as numbers; it should encourage honest reporting and shared reflection to learn from difficulties as well as successes:

The level of reporting and evaluation required as part of Renaissance to date has been a huge burden on participating museums, and MLA’s failure to deploy these pooled resources both for shared learning for the sector and advocacy beyond the sector has been a major concern.

We also want to see a process that emphasises quality and impact (outcomes) more than activity (outputs), so that the evidence collected is meaningful.

Most importantly, we would seek a mature relationship between funder and client in which there is honest reporting and an open dialogue which fosters shared and incisive reflection on both successes and difficulties or failures. Co-ordination of monitoring, reporting and evaluation methods so that evidence and data can be compared and collated will enable shared learning and advocacy. Opportunities need to be created for organisations, coalitions and networks to share learning far more widely than has been the case.

2.7 Organisations may be asked to sign up to all goals:

In ACE’s national portfolio decisions, organisations were required to demonstrate how they would achieve at least two of five goals.

Depending on the final goals for museums, we would like to see an approach which requires applicants to commit to a larger number of goals, or even all goals. In particular an absolute focus on public benefit and impact, including deep audience engagement, should be compulsory for all museums funded au ACE.

2.8 Holistic investment around core purpose, across the whole organisation/partnership- not separate programmes and projects:

Much of the investment and activity of Renaissance was ‘ringfenced’ within organisations. One damaging aspect of this is that the learning and transformation achieved as part of Renaissance was not always embedded and has been diluted or lost as funding is reduced and Renaissance-funded staff leave.

We would like to see holistic and integrated investment to strengthen the long-term impact of organisations, or consortia of organisations, across the breadth of their activities.

2.9 Investment should encourage coalitions to strengthen impact and reach, and drive efficiencies.

Particularly at a time when some organisations are struggling, coalitions may strengthen services for a defined area. Coalitions would bring together organisations to increase public impact and opportunities for engagement and participation. They would aim to create services which individual museums could not do alone, adding public benefit and value beyond that which would otherwise be achieved.

We would expect that there would be coalitions among museums, focused on impact and benefit. We acknowledge that there may also be benefits in coalitions across art forms and institutions, where these are clearly driven by purpose and are based on a clearly defined area (such as the Newcastle and Gateshead Cultural Venues Network).

2.10 Organisations in an area should support each other in delivery and development:

As noted above, the long-term goal of funding should be that of a good quality (or even excellent) museum and gallery service for the full range of people in a defined geographical, social or demographic area, to which all institutions in that area contribute. To achieve this, institutions will need to support each other in delivery, proportionately to the ACE investment they receive. ACE should also encourage museums it funds to take a broader view and developmental role, working with others in order to increase benefits to audiences and optimise organisational resources.

2.11 Investment should allow for the broadening of ‘museum’ services and cultural provision beyond buildings where it can deliver strong reach and impact:

The ACE National Portfolio includes risk taking and innovative organisations, many of which operate without public venues of their own.

Many museums are important as public places and spaces: the ‘where’ of museums is often much more significant than the location of an orchestra or dance company, for example. Museums have built up massive and diverse audiences primarily through developing their programming within venues.

At the same time, we would like to see investment that allows for a broader definition of ‘museum’ to include, for example, creative use of shared collections and resources working with a wider public in a wider range of places. Glasgow’s Open Museum and the Marches Network’s Museums on the Move are two examples of this.

2.12 Sector-wide programmes should also be driven by the overarching goals:

We believe that there is a continuing need for nationally planned sectoral programmes to support museum development strategically and to provide advice. These sector-wide programmes may take up to 15% of ACE’s funding for non-national museums. However, the existing range of advisory and ‘support’ agencies, frameworks and networks should be reviewed and simplified. They need to have the aim of supporting museums’ ability to achieve the overarching goals and strengthening the sector’s ability to achieve greater impact and public benefit. The Renaissance ‘other programmes’ strand lacked coherence and lacked this clarity of purpose.

Areas that need to be reviewed together – and given clarity and coherence - include museum development, workforce development, collections advice and the Collections Trust, support for museums to achieve Accreditation, and the Subject Specialist Networks.

We believe that the future thrust of the substantial museum development fund should be on development rather than continuing support. Development should aim to maximise public impact and benefit and to create organisational resilience that can sustainably deliver that impact in the long-term. This will involve helping to build coalitions to improve impact and fostering self-help. In the short term, this function should also support museums to adopt the expanded Accreditation framework being introduced this year. Again, thinking outside the box for museum development may foster greater creativity and productivity in a developmental function, in addition to paid officer positions.

To help museums achieve the overarching goals there will be a continuing need for nationally specified, locally accessible programmes of development, training and support for organisations and individuals. To an extent this work falls mid-way between that recently provided by hubs and by museum development officers. Local/regional/national coalitions and organisations could bid to deliver this training, development and support. Coalitions might include as members the existing regional federations.

Our initial thinking is that Subject Specialist Networks should not be supported per se, but in the wider context of local/regional/national coalitions. SSNs could play a defined role, working with others to develop, train and support organisations and individuals to improve public impact.

Networks within the sector at present are generally specialist – by subject, organisational governance and type or professional function. We believe that there is a real need for these different networks to learn from each other.

In the specific case of the Designation Challenge Fund, we believe that there does not need to be a separate fund for designated museums if, as we suggest, ACE’s role is to fund a wider range of museums to use their assets creatively to have an impact.

ACE should encourage national museums to be responsive to calls for advice, support and partnership from non-national museums.

2.13 ACE’s development function should encompass encouraging coalitions and partnerships, stimulating provision in ‘cold spots’ and broad sectoral programmes:

ACE would encourage organisations and coalitions of organisations to bring forward proposals to improve public benefit and impact in a defined geographic, social or demographic area, particularly areas that are currently under-served. This developmental and potentially ‘brokering’ role is particularly valuable in relation to the spread of benefit and the need for a clear and strategic approach to developmental programmes.

Working with other national organisations, ACE would also plan and specify the sector-wide programmes set out in 2.12.

ACE’s development function may also be to extend funding agreements beyond the three-year period, as you have done with the National Portfolio. This should only be in exceptional cases and where the applicant has demonstrated a clear case for longer term investment in development.

Museums Association

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