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MUSEUMS  
TASKFORCE  
REPORT AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS

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# 01.

## INTRODUCTION

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In 2016 the Museums Taskforce was convened by the Museums Association (MA) in response to the increasingly difficult financial situation that many museums in the UK face. The aim of the taskforce is to provide an independent voice to advocate for museums across the UK, using research and evidence to make the case to funders, politicians, stakeholders and the public.

The taskforce looked at the available research and evidence together with the reviews, reports and strategies that are being debated and developed across the UK. The taskforce recognises that culture is a devolved responsibility and has looked at the differing cultural landscapes and policies in the four nations to understand what they might learn from each other.

As well as examining the current state of museums the taskforce focused on three areas that it believes are critical for the future of the sector; these are funding, collections and relevance. These are not the only areas the sector needs to focus on but they are a good place to start. The taskforce recognises that these areas are interdependent and interrelated and in consultation with sector leaders it is making the recommendations that are detailed below to governments, stakeholders and the sector. Only by working in conjunction with politicians, funders and people who work in and with museums will it be possible to bring about the changes needed to create dynamic, sustainable and relevant organisations that are fit for the 21st century.

## 02. RELEVANCE

Museums bring meaning to our lives. They are dynamic and engaging places that play a critical role in linking our past to the present and helping us to shape the future. Through the power of collections they enable us to explore the most profound and enduring questions humans can ask about why we are here and our place in the world.

In an age of “alternative facts” and contested versions of history, museums provide the material evidence of our shared past and can use that evidence to host debate and discussion on contemporary topics and to prompt reflection. Museums help us negotiate the complex world around us; they are safe and trusted spaces for exploring challenging and difficult ideas.

### **Put simply, museums can help to make people’s lives better.**

- Museums enhance health and wellbeing.
- Museums are inclusive organisations that often work with vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- Museums contribute to life-long learning and inspire self-expression and creativity, helping to develop valuable, transferable skills.
- Museums entertain and inspire audiences, bringing communities together and informing individual and collective identity.
- Museums help to create a sense of belonging by working with communities and encouraging active public participation.
- Museums help to revitalise local economies, creating jobs and offering a wide range of employment, training and work-experience opportunities.
- Museums are integral to place-making and help to create better places for us all to live and work.

Museums perform many roles in society, but what makes them different is that they work with the public to explore and share compelling stories about real objects and collections in unique settings.

## Relevance recommendations

### **Governments, stakeholders and sector bodies should:**

- recognise the critical importance of museums to society
- support the development of a diverse and skilled workforce that is representative of local communities
- support the development of skills and confidence in people who work in and with museums to actively to articulate their value
- gather robust and consistent evidence and data drawn from a diverse range of museums throughout the UK
- support the development of advocacy toolkits, events, training and resources for the sector to enable people who work in and with museums to make the case to stakeholders and the public
- embed advocacy in professional development programmes and mentoring schemes.

### **Museums should:**

- work with staff, volunteers and audiences to create bold mission statements that clearly communicate their relevance to the communities and audiences that they serve
- strive to understand demographic and technological changes and address these through engaged dialogue and partnership, contemporary collecting and programming in order to remain relevant
- work in collaboration and partnership with community groups and third-sector organisations in order to reach new and diverse audiences.

## 03. COLLECTIONS

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Museums across the UK look after collections that are of local, national and international significance and which are valued and loved by the public. They work with the public to explore and share compelling stories about real objects and collections in unique settings that enable all of us to gain new knowledge and understanding. Collections and the connections they can make to the public, are the critical factor that make museums special and that differentiate them from visitor attractions, educational charities and other public services.

Museums are actively collecting and are using their collections to work with new and diverse audiences. They are trusted and inclusive spaces that care for rich and varied collections on behalf of past, present and future generations. These collections can be used to tell many varied and meaningful stories and can help us connect the past with the present.

Museums can make a real difference in society through the unique perspectives, insights and experiences that having collections enables them to offer the public. Through their programmes and displays, museums have the power to create a sense of wonder: to inform, move and inspire.

### **The challenge**

Managing, caring for and sharing collections costs money and that money is in increasingly short supply. Making collections accessible and inclusive for a wide range of audiences is fundamental to a museum's purpose and requires adequate resource.

Underpinning the effective use of collections, including income generation, is good housekeeping. Rationalisation, digitisation and conservation are all means to an end - the long-term care, management and use of our collections.

It is well understood that many museums have full stores, collections acquired inconsistently and gaps in collections knowledge. It is necessary to break the cycle of having too much material that is not being used or delivering public benefit, not enough information about what museums have, and insufficient capacity to manage collections and make confident and informed decisions.

## 03. COLLECTIONS (CONTINUED...)

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### What next for collections?

Museums need to decide what their priorities are and review the impact of collections development policy and practice over the last decade to make collections more sustainable.

Museums need to examine whether they are effectively mobilising collections (and monetising them) to support sustainable options for the future. Can they do more to make their assets work harder or realise their value by letting them go? Can they make brave decisions and explore a flexible approach to ownership of assets and find other bold and practical solutions?

### Collections recommendations

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- Museums should foster a brave approach to collections management and rationalisation, taking a collective responsibility to resolve the gap between theory and practice.
- Museums need to help stakeholders and the public recognise the irreplaceable value of collections and their role in society.
- The sector should reflect on collections policy and practice over the past decade, including approaches to rationalisation, disposal, storage, loans and acquisitions.
- Museums should work with their communities to develop contemporary collecting plans that reflect the diversity of modern Britain.
- Museums should work with communities, volunteers and others to ensure their knowledge and expertise contributes to understanding and managing collections.
- National, regional and local museums should work in partnership to share knowledge, resources and capacity and explore the potential for national collections held across multiple sites.
- Schemes such as Accreditation, Designation and Recognition are critical tools for maintaining standards and developing collections and they need development and resource to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- Stakeholders and museums should consider the development of local endowments to help secure the future of collections and institutions.
- The sector should consider more radical approaches to the disposal of collections in order to help secure the long-term future of the organisation's core collections.

## 04. FUNDING

Museums have received significant public funding from national and local governments and the lottery and this investment is paying dividends. Museums are working in partnership with local authorities and governments to contribute across a range of public policy areas across the UK from culture, science, education and tourism to place-making, immigration, hate-crime reduction, international trade and diplomacy, anti-poverty initiatives, health and wellbeing and social services.

Museums have taken serious steps to raise additional income and reduce costs and have deployed a variety of means to become more sustainable, from the creative use of buildings to crowd-sourcing and working in partnership. All museums face the same issues of high fixed overheads inherent in what makes them unique - caring for collections and buildings and ensuring public access. To do this, museums need long-term strategic investment and consistent levels of funding.

**Culture is a devolved responsibility in the UK and each administration has its own approach to museum funding. Recommendations on funding for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found here:**

[Museums Taskforce Statement on Funding, England](#)

[Museums Taskforce Statement on Funding, Northern Ireland](#)

[Museums Taskforce Statement on Funding, Scotland](#)

[Museums Taskforce Statement on Funding, Wales](#)

## 05. CONCLUSION

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Museums in the UK face significant challenges if they are to effectively manage their collections, be relevant to diverse and broad audiences and secure sustainable futures. Over the coming months the taskforce will work with the MA, other sector bodies, governments, funders and stakeholders to implement these recommendations and will review progress at the MA Conference in November 2018.

### **About the Museums Taskforce**

The Museums Taskforce was convened by the MA to examine the current context for museums and to make recommendations that will support the sustainability of the sector. Membership of the taskforce is drawn from a range of museums and its work has been supported in consultation with museum leaders across the UK.

### **Membership:**

Chair: Laura Pye, head of culture, Bristol City Council; Kate Anrold-Forster, director, University Museums and Special Collections Services, University of Reading; Claire Browne, chair, Museum Development Network; Tony Butler, executive director, Derby Museums; Gillian Findlay, curatorial and engagement manager, Edinburgh City Council; David Fleming, director, National Museums Liverpool; Elaine Hill, heritage development officer, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council; Emmie Kell, chief executive, Cornish Museums Partnership; Reyahn King, director, York Museums Trust; David Liddement, creative director, All3Media; Steve Miller, head of Norfolk Museums Service; Victoria Rogers, museum manager Cardiff Story; John Roles, head of Leeds Museums and Galleries; Iain Watson, director, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums; Gordon Watson, chief executive Lakeland Arts.



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