



MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION

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INSPIRING MUSEUMS TO CHANGE LIVES

MANIFESTO 2019



SUPPORTING MUSEUMS TO CHANGE LIVES

This manifesto calls for increased investment in museums across the UK, recognising that funding and support for culture and museums is a devolved responsibility in the UK. This means that there needs to be fair funding settlements for devolved administrations so that they can invest in museums, as well as investment in museums in England.

There are over 2,500 museums across the UK, with a huge variety of collections from social history to fine art, science and industry and national collections.

Museums are an essential part of the fabric of society. They are loved and trusted by the public and museum attendance has increased across all regions and nations over the past decade.

Museums' role as a key part of our cultural and social infrastructure is well established. In addition to collecting and researching and exhibiting collections, museums are at the

heart of civic life, helping to make our villages, towns and cities vibrant places to live, work and visit. Museums attract tourists and drive economic activity as well as providing a sense of local pride for communities.

Museums can also have a transformational impact on people. They can enhance health and wellbeing and are spaces where the public can experience a wide range of cultures and ideas. They use their collections and knowledge in innovative ways to help us understand, debate, and challenge the major issues that we face, such as inequality, technological change and climate crisis. Many museums also work to enhance the life chances of their diverse audiences and communities by promoting learning, engagement and inclusion.

However, our museums face a number of important challenges and need support and investment in order to deliver.

PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

After a decade of austerity, museums across the UK urgently need substantial public investment to maintain collections, buildings and estates; lead regeneration of towns and cities across the UK; and build museums' capacity to support learning, engagement and health and wellbeing.

- **Support local museums**

Many local museums deliver transformational and engaging experiences working with their local communities and they need investment and support from their local authorities to do that. We need a fair funding settlement from national governments to Local Government to enable local authorities to support and invest in their museums.

- **Support urgent repairs to museum buildings and estates.**

There is a huge backlog of urgent repairs and maintenance in museum buildings – many of which are vitally important listed buildings. Many museums now face daily battles against leaks, crumbling buildings and creaking infrastructure.

The recently announced £125m for maintenance for regional museums in England is a welcome start. However, more will be needed to meet the urgent maintenance and infrastructure needs. The fund should be embedded and the UK government should examine how it can work with devolved governments to make equivalent funding available for museums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- **Support museums' capacity to deliver place-making, health and wellbeing and learning and engagement.**

Museums use their spaces, collections and expertise to enhance people's quality of life, improve educational outcomes and create culture-led regeneration projects for our towns and cities. However many museums have been forced to scale back their ambitions in these areas because of the pressure on public funding over the past decade. Substantial new investment would enable museums to deliver outcomes that meet local priorities, informed by local communities. This investment should also be used to enable museums to work in partnership with third sector organisations and businesses in order to increase their local impact.

- **Support digital infrastructure and engagement to ensure museums and collections remain accessible, relevant and innovative.**

The museum sector lags behind other sectors in this area and museums need to grow their digital capacity in areas including digitising collections, linking collections information and improving online engagement. Government support would be particularly welcome in creating or enabling a single point of entry for digitised collections.

- **Embed Exhibition Tax Relief**

The Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief was introduced in 2017 and has been successful in supporting museums across the UK to create and tour innovative new

exhibitions. £4m was claimed in the first year of the scheme and more is expected to be claimed in future years. However, the relief has a sunset clause and will be discontinued in 2022. There is no equivalent sunset clause for any other creative industry relief and we believe that the next government should remove this clause and support the scheme as a matter of urgency.

- **Maintain free entry to national museums**

Free entry to national museums has been one of the major cultural policy successes of recent times. Since free entry to national museums in England was introduced in 2001 attendance has more than doubled. Free entry delivers a huge range of cultural, learning and economic benefits.

Protecting free admission to national museums was a manifesto pledge of all the major political parties at the last general election. The new government should commit to maintaining free entry for national museums.

- **Negotiate a close economic partnership with the EU that works for museums**

A No Deal Brexit would be highly damaging for museums and for the communities that they serve. We believe that the best outcome for museums would be for the UK to remain a member of the European Union. However, if the current Brexit deal or similar is implemented, we believe that the next government should commit to ensuring a future partnership with Europe that is based on:

- Maintaining inbound tourism from EU Member States and ensuring no new barriers are erected.
- Maintaining the exchange of skills and expertise amongst UK and EU museum staff and ensuring the availability of visas for specialist cultural or scientific skills. Removal of blanket salary thresholds.
- Maintaining import/export rules for cultural objects that allow the simple, speedy and safe exchange of museum objects or specimens with other EU Member States.
- Maintaining continued participation in key European funding schemes. Currently, our museums lead internationally funded research projects, including those funded by the EU such as Creative Europe and Horizon 2020. It is vital that the UK's museums and galleries can take part in future programmes as lead partners in these projects and access this funding.

- **Simplify business rates**

Business rates are a major financial burden on the museum sector. Museums are valued differently across the UK. Applying a fair and simple valuation would provide a consistent and cost-effective approach which would aid the long-term support of many museums. Most importantly, the change would stop the recycling of public money caused by charging exorbitant business rates to public institutions.

Please contact us to find out more on the points in this document.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION

The Museums Association is the independent membership organisation representing museums and galleries in the UK and the people who work for them. It was formed in 1889 and is a not-for-profit charity that champions the value of museums to society and supports and develops the people who work in them.