BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC ENGAGEMENT WITH LONDON'S MUSEUMS

Telling it like it is: Non-user Research

January - April 2004

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Executive Summary

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

London's museums are a central feature in the cultural landscape of the capital. They offer an institutional expression of our shared identity by preserving and interpreting a common history. Yet too often, London's museums are failing to attract the capital's population in all its diversity.

In December 2003, ALM commissioned StUF to investigate why London's museums and galleries do not attract an audience that more truly reflects the diverse multi-cultural and multi-ethnic demographic character of the capital's resident community.

StUF conducted an initial review of existing literature in preparation for the wider research project. The time constraints of the project meant this review was restricted to 18 key reports, the majority of which have been published over the last seven years.

This literature review provided the analytical framework for StUF's empirical research, in the form of a street survey, in which 594 visible minority ethnic people were interviewed. The street survey was followed by four focus group sessions involving 26 participants.

Although not the intention, in practice the research has focused upon VBME's between the ages of 16 - 40. The younger age profile reflects the fact that far fewer older people were willing to stop for the street interviews, and were less likely to speak good enough English to be able to take part.

The findings of this research echo many of the previous studies in the field and reveal an attitude within the museum sector as a whole - with notable exceptions - that demonstrates what Sir William Macpherson defines as institutional racism. This is clearly an untenable position to maintain.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

It has been clear for a long time that people from black and minority ethnic communities do not visit museums. What is surprising is how little progress has been made in addressing those issues.

Government departments and public agencies have issued museums with a plethora of reports and guidance notes on engaging excluded audiences. Furthermore, the sector now has a positive duty to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

If museums are to meet the challenges of playing a broader societal role they must first demonstrate their relevance to Britain's diverse communities. Embracing diversity is no longer an optional extra, it needs to be at the heart of everything that museums do.

PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE

Much work has already been undertaken to explore patterns of museum attendance amongst excluded groups. The London Museums Service's 1991 report, Dingy Places, found that white Londoners were twice more likely than black and 50% more likely than Asian Londoners to visit a museum.

More recently, Holding up the Mirror (October 2003) concluded that London's minority ethnic communities are getting a 'raw deal' from the capital's museums. It would seem that little or no progress on this issue has been made in the last twelve years.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

There is a substantial body of literature across the various public policy domains suggesting that black and minority ethnic communities face multiple barriers in accessing public services and provision.

Numerous reports have observed that the museum sector concentrates overwhelmingly upon a dominant white culture, and one that has little or no direct relevance to the lives of black and minority ethnic people. In our opinion, those problems are symptomatic of a wider failure of engagement.

It is also important to recognise that notions of both ethnicity and exclusion are complex. For this report, identity was based solely on ethnicity. This excludes therefore dynamics of age or gender, for example, but perhaps, most importantly in this case, socio-economic background/class.

A body of good practice has grown up and there are some exemplar projects in existence. However, 'Holding Up the Mirror', the most recent report published by the London Museums Agency in October 2003, reveals that the isolated examples of good practice have not been transposed into changing the mainstream practices of the museum sector.

STREET SURVEY

StUF's street surveys revealed a general lack of interest in museums and galleries among BME groups. They were largely unwilling to take part in the questionnaire as they felt they had not much to say about issues in the sector. Overall the response rate was around 1 in 10. Some key findings emerged:

- 63% of participants were either negative or indifferent about museums.
- 23% had never been to a museum.
- 40% went to a museum for the education of their children.
- 70% of 16-25 year olds and 75% of those aged 60+ had not been to a museum in the last two years.
- 75% of Black Africans had not visited a museum in the last two years compared with 50% of those classifying themselves as Black British.
- 74% had not heard of any museum in their borough.
- Awareness of the National museums was much higher than local museums.
- Popular local museums appear to be a gateway to wider museum attendance.

FOCUS GROUPS

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the views and attitudes of BME museum non-users in greater depth. Although many themes expressing a common view emerged, there was a distinct difference in attitudes between BME people who were born in the UK and those who had moved here from abroad.

The findings of the focus groups fall into four categories.

Attitudes to museums and galleries

- Museums and galleries are for school trips, history lessons and formal learning.
- Museums and galleries are great places for a family day out.
- Museums place too much emphasis on the most boring aspects of history.
- Visiting a museum is time consuming and inconvenient.
- Museums are too formal.
- Museums are for the white middle classes.
- Museums should showcase contemporary culture and focus more on recent history.
- Museums should actively invite new audiences.

History and culture

- Current museum provision is boring and irrelevant.
- History and culture is personal and so museums should explore common themes such as immigration.
- Museums have a role to play in promoting greater understanding of Britain's multicultural roots.
- Museums should focus on the development of relationships between Britain and other countries.
- Museums should show the role of the British in other countries.
- Museums have the potential to promote deeper self-understanding through access to history.
- Museums should stress the contribution of BME communities and peoples in history.

- Museums should appeal to a younger audience through popular street culture, music and the cult of celebrity.

Barriers to attendance

- Museums are exclusive and too specialist.
- Museums are closely linked to formal education.
- Museums focus on the past.
- Museums do not reflect or acknowledge BME groups.
- Museums do not welcome BME groups or provide information in community languages.
- Museums do not engage with BME groups or encourage participation.
- There is a lack of champions and role models.
- People have better things to do with their time.

What would you like to see in museums?

- Museums should show second generation BME people what life is like in their parents' country of origin.
- Museums should highlight ways that different cultures have impacted on and been claimed by modern British society.
- Museum staff should be more pro-active and knowledgeable.
- There should be more BME people at a senior level.
- Museums should focus more on recent history.
- Museum displays should be more high-tech.
- Museums buildings should be modernised.

- Museums could be cultural and community hubs.
- National museums should do more to promote local museums.
- Museums should take a more targeted approach to attracting BME groups.
- Museums should connect to religious festivals and other community events.
- There should be a specialist BME History museum.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

London's museum sector is failing to engage the capital's population in all its diversity. One in three residents in London now belongs to a black and minority ethnic community, but less than one out of every five visits to a museum is made by a black and minority ethnic person.

All of this has been known for over thirteen years - ever since the publication of 'Dingy Places' in 1991. What is surprising is the lack of progress that has been made in encouraging more black and minority ethnic people to use museums.

We believe that a major factor behind this persistent failure is insufficient awareness of the specific needs and preferences of a black and ethnic minority audience.

Museums, through past curatorial practices, are overwhelmingly 'object-oriented'. Our focus group participants argued that if they are to attract black and ethnic minority audiences they must become what we would term more 'relationship-centred'.

Museums must move beyond the purely material approach to embrace other forms off cultural experience in order to capture and more accurately represent London's rich past and diverse present.

The importance that museums have in the cultural life of our country rests in the search for a shared identity in a confusing, often conflicting and rapidly changing world. Museums should work to present an inclusive form of British identity and history. We have conceptualised this as an 'open history' that encourage linkages, connections and comparisons and promotes wider understanding of our population's diverse cultures and histories.

We have grouped the Conclusions and Recommendations into four seperate sections.

DEVELOPING AND REINTERPRETING COLLECTIONS

All museums should strive to make the product more relevant to black and minority ethnic communities by:

- Profiling potential black and minority ethnic audience base through demographic data.
- Considering the relevance of the current interpretation of collections to black and minority ethnic communities.
- Focusing more on people rather than place with a new focus on the role and contribution of BME people.
- Making their collections more diverse and more relevant.
- Creating temporary exhibitions, taking displays out into the community, and extending loans.
- Presenting an inclusive form of British identity and history.
- Relating collections more directly to current issues of importance to black and minority ethnic groups.
- Placing a greater emphasis on contemporary culture and recent history.

- Considering how they can achieve engagement with the emotions and feelings of visitors through the use of video, audio and tactile displays and more interactive features.

BETTER COMMUNICATIONS

All museums should seek to build a bigger and more diverse audience by:

- Raising awareness of the museum sector as a whole.
- Producing targeted publicity towards different black and minority ethnic communities and age groups.
- Ensure that all publicity materials positively reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of London and avoid stereotyping.
- Developing mechanisms for consultation with all potential audiences.
- Monitoring user databases, invite lists and membership schemes and actively promoting equality.
- Ensuring that exhibitions relevant to a particular community are promoted appropriately.
- Actively inviting a wider range of audiences through events, other activities and celebrity openings.
- Encouraging family activities and life-long learning.
- Displaying a commitment to a wider range of contemporary arts and culture.
- Creating stronger linkages between the past and the present.
- Having local champions within the community to promote awareness and act as ambassadors for the museum sector.
- Emphasising the value of visiting and the fact of free entry.

- Raising the visibility of museums through effective signage, advertising and external displays.
- Using ICT to reach out to a wider audience.
- Encouraging a 'drop by' approach.

A STRONGER COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

Museums need to improve their customer relations, particular with BME groups who perceive the sector as catering, almost exclusively, for the white middle-classes. All museums should:

- Consult with and actively involve local black and minority ethnic communities.
- Present a more inclusive form of identity by acknowledging in a more balanced interpretation of Britain's links and historical relationships with other countries.
- Forge stronger links with local community and faith groups to attract new users.
- Promote activities at black and minority ethnic cultural events.
- Be aware of the calendar of activities within black and minority communities and seek to develop participatory events.
- Promote citizenship programmes relevant to London's increasingly diverse population for all residents.
- Employ staff from a diversity of backgrounds to ensure that they are more representative of London's black and minority ethnic communities.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

There is growing demand for the museum sector to work in partnership with outside organisations and engage more effectively in wider government agendas. To this end ALM should:

- Do more to promote the value created by local museums to statutory, voluntary and private organisations.
- Engage more effectively with the relevant pan London networks.
- Work more closely with London local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships to develop cultural diversity strategies.
- Work more closely with the local museums to foster closer relationships regeneration partnerships.
- Encourage better partnership working between libraries and museums.
- Strengthen arrangements for museums to collaborate more effectively on joint projects.
- Build the entrepreneurial capacity of local museums.
- Ensure that all museums are aware of the relevant guidance concerning cultural diversity and equal opportunities.
- Collect, collate and monitor patterns of museum attendance and employment to ensure that progress is made in achieving diversity targets.
- Promote the establishment and promotion of cultural quarters.

Additionally, all museums should

- Develop stronger partnership working arrangements with local black and minority ethnic groups.
- Consult with local schools and the local communities to supplement the national curriculum around local history and in particular black and minority ethnic history needs.
- Ensure that collections are linked to the requirements of the national curriculum
- Build stronger links with their appropriate local authority and Local Strategic Partnership.
- Ensure that they maintain good knowledge of what is happening in other museums and promote those events more widely.

Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the literature review was to prepare the ground for the empirical research into why London's museums and galleries do not attract an audience that more truly reflects the diverse multi-cultural and multi-ethnic demographic character of the capital's resident community.

Our empirical research took the form of a street survey in which 594 visible minority ethnic people were interviewed. The street survey was followed by four focus group sessions involving 26 participants. The literature review provided the analytical framework to constitute the questions for the street survey and the topic guide of the focus group discussions.

In total, some 18 different reports, policy papers and have been summarised and analysed. Common themes have been identified, and these have been structured as:

• The case for change
• Patterns of attendance
• Breaking down the barriers

The concluding section pulls the main threads together. Much work has already been undertaken to explore patterns of museum attendance. It has been clear for a long time that people from black and minority ethnic communities do not visit museums and the reasons are well understood. What is surprising is how little progress has been made in addressing those issues.

First though a note of explanation on the scope of the literature review and the methodology employed in carrying it out.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The literature review has been constrained by the project timescale and resources available. Hence we would not claim that it is comprehensive. Most of the material was provided by the client, supplemented by our own knowledge of some key documents in the field. From the outset then, we need to be clear of the limitations of the exercise.

The procedure for a full literature review usually entails a systematic trawl through many different sources and kinds of documentation, employing an agreed methodology for the selection and sifting of relevant material. Typically it will include peer recommendations and reviews, key word searches of various electronic databases and library catalogues, and web searches using the main search engines. If those search protocols are followed rigorously it is not unusual to acquire lists in the order of 500+ hits. Our partial literature review has covered a much smaller range of 18 reports, the majority of which have been published over the last seven years.

The issue of black and minority ethnic exclusion has been extensively researched over recent years, and there is a large and rapidly growing body of literature available. For example, a literature review carried out by Nina Morris[1] on access to public open spaces by black and minority ethnic groups includes 127 references. A similar density of publication exists in other social policy domains such as housing, health employment, education, and arts and culture. A cross-cutting literature review

across all the social policy domains to identify common themes is long overdue.

Finally, for most literature reviews the standard practice is to start with a definition of terms. Again the constraints upon the project have made this unachievable. But it is important to recognise that notions of ethnicity and exclusion are complex. Even the use of the term 'minority ethnic group' has been contested. Concepts of identity based solely on ethnicity exclude the dynamics of age, gender, sexual orientation, class and place.

Similar constitutive and normalising processes underwrite our conceptualisation of museums and galleries. Collins English Dictionary defines a museum as 'a place or building where objects of historical, artistic or scientific interest are exhibited, preserved, or studies, and a gallery as 'a room or building for exhibiting works of art'. The erosion of difference between museums and galleries as practiced by the Department of Culture, Museums and Sport (DCMS) is not particularly helpful in this regard as it is clear to us that most people in practice make a clear distinction between the two. Overwhelmingly, museums are associated with history and heritage. Again, we are aware that these are areas of considerable debate.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Museums have played, and continue to play a central, if at times not always an immediately visible role, within a country's cultural life. Their institutional importance derives from the way in which they create, preserve and legitimise a sense of national identity by reference to a shared, common history. It is no accident that the first museum, established in 318 B.C. in Ancient Rome, was essentially a military museum, which through its display of the spoils of conquest provided a powerful reminder to its audience of Roman imperial might[2]. Similarly our museums (perhaps most particularly the national museums) are intrinsically tied to Britain's own imperial past; and it is the legacy of that imperial past and the way that it is presented that can be problematic for our black and minority ethnic communities.

Ever since the end of World War Two, the nature of our national identity has been a matter of much ongoing discussion and debate, precipitated by the loss of the British Empire, and the consequent search to find a new place in the world that still shapes much of our foreign policy. Over that time Britain itself has become an increasingly diverse and multi-cultural society, partly through the economic situation of the late 1950's and early 1960's, when the pressing need for labour was met in a large part by immigration from the West Indies (an interesting parallel with the emerging labour and skills shortages in the UK today); and also as a result of more recent demographic and lifestyle changes consequent upon rising prosperity and affluence. Those dramatic social and economic changes mark a fundamental structural shift in society to that of the post-imperial, post-modern, or post-industrial age.

The election of the New Labour government in 1997(and subsequently again in 2002) represents the success of a political party more finely attuned to the spirit of the times. Over the last seven years, New Labour has embarked an ambitious and far-reaching programme of national renewal and reform in many areas of economic, social and public life. For our

purposes here, the key policy imperatives of most relevance can be summarised as:

• Creating a fairer, more equitable and more inclusive society.
• Raising the skills levels and educational achievement of all our citizens to remain competitive in a global economy.
• Modernising our public institutions in order that they become more relevant, effective and efficient.

This Government is forcing the pace of change for the museum sector on many different fronts. For example, the government's economic policies are rooted in the belief that the future prosperity of the country depends upon it becoming a high wage/high skill economy. In the 'knowledge economy' creativity and culture are at a premium. Museums are not only important cultural institutions in their own right as major visitor attractions, and provide a valuable knowledge resource for other cultural industries, but they are also considered to have an important educational and training role. The DCMS report, 'A Common Wealth - Museums in the Learning Age', emphasised the importance of the educational role of museums, particularly in fostering creativity. It describes education as "the golden key" that opens doors to skills, money and facilities and it promotes the role of museums as catalysts for lifelong learning.

Museums are considered to be, at least have the potential to be, major agents for social change, promoting and supporting social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal. The Government's vision for the role of libraries museums and galleries in tackling social exclusion is set out in the 2001 report issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) called

'Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All'[3]. It follows publication of the museum access policy standards published by DCMS in 1997 (updated in 1999)[4]. Museums are expected to promote social inclusion and ensure that in the delivery of their services they serve and meet the needs of all sections of society, particularly those groups who are marginalized and excluded from the mainstream. As the cultural diversity and social inclusion agendas are interlinked, museums have a central role to play in ensuring that all our different cultural groups and communities are involved in opportunities for education, lifelong learning and cultural development. The importance attached to the work of museums in this area is perhaps best illustrated by the plethora of papers, reports and guidance notes that have been issued by different Government departments and other public agencies to encourage museums to engage successfully with diverse and excluded communities.

As the majority of museums receive substantial public funds, one would expect the sector to be more responsive to the priorities of government. Moreover around 40% of registered museums are operated by local authorities, and they fall under the legal requirements of the Local Government Act 1999[5]. This Act introduced the Best Value regime, which sets out the new procurement regime in the supply of public goods and services. Although arcane to many, it has placed local government services, including museums, under much greater scrutiny then before. The purpose of the Act is threefold: to increase the transparency of decision-making processes; to raise the efficiency and efficacy of public services; and to build a greater sense of local community

connection to our public institutions. Best Value has introduced new monitoring and more rigorous regimes, and an accompanying script of 'key performance targets' and 'floor targets'.

Another piece of legislation that has a major bearing on the museum sector is the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which was enacted following the publication of the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. The Act places a positive duty on all major public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations.

Thus the museum sector has to be more aware of and responsive to various government agendas. In order to survive museums will have to become more than visitor attractions, and demonstrate that they are contributing to wider strategic objectives and a broader societal role. Whilst some have argued that museums will 'need sustainable funding to build social inclusion work into the core functioning and missions of local authority museums'[6], we think that this is a fundamental misreading of the modernising agenda. Social inclusion work is not an optional extra, it needs to be at the heart of everything that museums do and may well require a reprioritisation of existing resources. Yet, as the next section shows, many museums are struggling to demonstrate their relevance to Britain's diverse communities, let alone being able to contribute significantly to other social regeneration and educational priorities. In our opinion, those problems are symptomatic of a wider failure of engagement.

PATTERNS OF ATTENDANCE

Our research project can be considered to be book-marked by two reports. The first is Dingy Places[7], a groundbreaking piece of work, published in 1991, which drew upon the 1989 Arts Attitudes Survey carried out by Greater London Arts. The 1989 Survey revealed that white Londoners were 50% more likely than Asian and 100% more likely than black Londoners to visit a museum. The propensity to visit a museum can be presented in a slightly different fashion as follows:

White	44%
Asian	33.3%
Black	22.2%.

Dingy Places makes the point that most Londoners simply do not go to museums. They are generally viewed as dull, expensive and unwelcoming places, failing to interest and engage with potential audiences - and that the lack of engagement is particularly marked for black and minority ethnic communities. The report recommends various ways in which visitor figures can be improved and how museums could attract a greater diversity of audiences.

If we fast forward to the most recent research contained in Holding Up the Mirror (October 2003)[8], we can see what, if any, progress has been made by London's museum sector in attracting a larger and more diverse audience base. Although one in three Londoners are from black or minority ethnic groups, less than a quarter of museum visitors (24%) are drawn from those communities. Examining the audience figures in more detail, only 7% of visitors are of an Asian and 9% are of a black background. Whilst the report

praises the pioneering cultural diversity work that some museums are doing, it concludes that 'London's minority ethnic communities are getting a raw deal for the capital's museums and galleries'.

Comparing two studies that analyse museum attendance using different methodologies is fraught with difficulty. Dingy Places takes a sample survey of the general public, asking individuals about their visiting patterns: whereas, Holding Up the Mirror is an analysis of actual attendance figures. For all sorts of reasons, people are more likely to say that they go to, than actually visit museums or galleries. Nevertheless, the correspondence between the two reports is striking. In 1991, Dingy Places established the significantly fewer black and minority ethnic Londoners say that they visit museums when compared to the white population; and in 2003, Holding Up the Mirror showed that there are marked differences in actual attendance rates between black and minority ethnic groups and white people. Little or no progress in breaking down the barriers to museum attendance amongst London's black and minority ethnic communities over the last twelve years.

An opposing point of view emerges from the study published as Focus on Cultural Diversity: The Arts in England in 2003[9]. This is the second of two comprehensive surveys of the attitude, experience and engagement of England's diverse population with arts and culture by the Office of National Statistics. The results are surprising, and in many cases fly in the face of many generally accepted assumptions. Just over a third of the survey respondents had visited a museum or art gallery within the last year. For white people the

percentage is 36%, lower than the 1989 Art Attitudes Survey; but what is most striking is that 44% of mixed ethnicity respondents and 32% of black or British black respondents have visited a museum or gallery - compare the latter with 22.2% of black Londoners. The attendance patterns for the Asian population are much lower than the 1989 Survey.

Both the Office of National Statistics study and Dingy Places employ broadly the same methodology. But they arrive at different conclusions. One way of explaining the difference is that over the last ten or so years a marked shift has occurred in the propensities of different black and minority ethnic groups to say that they visit museums. Even if this is the case, actual audience figures suggest that patterns of behaviour have not changed and that many black and ethnic minority communities are excluded from museums and galleries.

We shall examine the barriers to participation later in the report. At this point, it is worth considering whether those barriers are specific to black and minority groups in society, or if any other causal factors are at play. The first Office for National Statistics Survey suggests a clear association between socio-economic group and also age and expressed preferences for visiting museums and galleries. Managerial and professional groups were more than twice as likely (54%) to visit museums and galleries than the semi-routine (22%) and routine groups (21%); and the age groups most likely to visit museums were the 35-44 and 45-54, with attendance figures much lower for 16-24 (28%) and 75+ (21%). Because the demographic profile of the black and minority ethnic population is both younger and skewed towards the lower level socio-

economic groups, this may be the explanation for lower participation rates. However research in other areas suggests that black and ethnic minority communities do face specific disadvantages. Thus even when you take into account the whole range of controlling factors and circumstances, people from minority ethnic groups do not get a fair deal from today's labour market (Fieldhouse & Gould 1998)[10]. Berthoud[11] terms this the ethnic penalty in their labour market participation. Does a similar ethnic penalty restrict access to museums and galleries? Much more work is required to establish the relative importance of ethnicity, class and age in determining the audience composition of museums and galleries and their interactive effects.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

For many years now, a substantial body of literature across the various public policy domains has suggested that black and minority ethnic communities face multiple barriers in accessing public services and provision. Whilst overtly racist practices are proscribed by legislation, more insidious and hidden forms of discrimination are still commonplace. In his report on the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lauwrence, Sir William Macpherson[12] coined the term 'institutional racism', which he went on to define as 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin'. He suggested that institutional racism was endemic amongst our public institutions and recommended that all public services should do more to promote racial equality and tackle discrimination.

The Macpherson Report stated that 'It is incumbent on every institution to examine their policies and the outcome of their policies and practices to guard against disadvantaging any sections of our communities'. The reports written from Dingy Places onwards contain a wealth of background analysis and policy recommendations available to be drawn upon by the museum sector in order to provide appropriate services to the black and minority ethnic communities.

The Mori research study conducted for English Heritage in 2000[13] identified four main barriers to experiencing heritage, which can be applied equally well to the museum sector. These are:

Pressure of time - changing patterns of leisure (particularly the increase in home based leisure pursuits), increased competition and greater variety of choice between different types of leisure opportunities; more pressure on time because of longer working hours.

Lack of interest - visits to heritage sites (and museums) restricted to holidays and tourists; teenagers and young people are least interested; little relevance to certain socio-economic and black and minority ethnic groups.

Poor awareness - poor publicity and marketing; perception of difficulties of understanding and aesthetic appreciation (the 'highbrow' factor) and of looking stupid.

Not feeling welcome - perception more prevalent among some socio-economic and black and minority ethnic groups; memories of previous bad experiences.

Whilst some of these barriers apply generally across the population, others apply with greater force or more specifically to black and minority ethnic communities. Those communities are much more likely to have negative impressions of museums because of previous experiences, to feel out of place when they visit museums, and not lack information and knowledge of museums. Throughout the literature a common observation is that the museum sector concentrates overwhelmingly upon a dominant white culture, and one that has little or no direct relevance to the lives of black and minority ethnic people.

There is no lack of advice about how those barriers should be tackled. The Resource report into creating the conditions for accessible learning in museums, galleries and libraries[14] suggests that attention needs to be paid to the following factors:

Physical - are buildings, events and collections accessible and welcoming?

Sensory - are the needs of those with hearing or visual impairment being met?

Intellectual - are diverse language and education abilities addressed? Are people with learning disabilities catered for?

Cultural - are all members of the community reflected and represented?

Attitudinal - are new users welcomed, do staff embrace diversity, is there a focus on users and potential users?

Financial - do charges take into account families and those on low incomes?

We have drawn together a list of specific actions from various sources. Many of the ideas first originated with Dingy Places.

Other important source documents include: the fact sheet by Naseem Khan produced for the Museums & Galleries Commission[15], the report by Helen Jermyn and Philly Desai[16],Museums for the Many[17], the findings of the Regional Museums Task Force[18], the recent report by the DCMS Libraries, Information and Archives Division[19]. Collectively, the main points can be summarised as:

- Collections should more relevant, reflect the diversity of their local audience.
- Culturally diverse displays and using images that promote diversity.
- Revising collections policies, especially concerning provenance.
- Exhibitions should reflect the history and contribution of black and minority groups in Britain, both in relation to major historical events such as the Second World War and to everyday life, without ignoring their 'homeland history'.
- Creating diverse temporary exhibitions and taking displays into the community.
- Extending loans of relevant items and exhibitions.
- Working with local communities, and engaging them in collection and interpretation.
- Targeting underrepresented groups and tailoring services to meet the needs of black and ethnic minority ethnic communities.
- Developing the skills and traditions of local communities and researching the history of specific groups.
- Developing community relations through outreach work.
- Consulting local communities and developing user involvement.

- Promoting a 'Cultural Champions' programme to engage young people in deprived areas.
- Piloting small scale projects and evaluating their impact.
- Developing imaginative marketing strategies, programming and ticketing arrangements (including the extensive use of advertising in the black media).
- Initiating comprehensive new approaches to visitor surveying.
- Using ICT to reach out to a wider audience.
- Becoming agents of social change by developing projects that improve the lives of the socially excluded.
- Encouraging family activities and lifelong learning.
- Employing staff from a diversity of backgrounds.
- Ensuring displays are interactive and varied.

Examples of good practice do exist. Through effective outreach work the Dulwich Picture Gallery has attracted excluded communities, and the potential for even small museums to engage with the local regeneration initiatives is exemplified by the Ragged School Museum[20]. Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Museum are cited as operating model projects in Museums for the Many. Other examples include the Museum of London's "Voices project", the Horniman Museum's "Inspiration Africa" project and programme of community consultation, and the Geffrye Museum's informal education project, which attracts a high proportion of black and minority ethnic participants[21].

CONCLUSIONS

The fact that proportionately fewer black and minority ethnic people are likely to visit museums than their white counterparts has been known from the late 1980's onwards. The reasons for this are complex, and other constitutive factors, such as class and age, need to be disentangled from the effects of racial disadvantage and discrimination. Nevertheless, the literature makes it apparent that there is a clear ethnic dimension to patterns of museum attendance.

In the decades since the publication of Dingy Places, a lot of research has been conducted into examining the barriers that restrict access to museums by our black and minority ethnic communities. A body of good practice has grown up and there are some exemplar projects in existence. However, 'Holding Up the Mirror', the most recent report published by the London Museums Agency in October 2003, reveals that the isolated examples of good practice have not been transposed into changing the mainstream practices of the museum sector. The report concludes that the museum sector is giving London's diverse communities a 'raw deal'.

One can speculate why the London museum sector has been so resistant to change over the last ten years or so. The attitude of the sector as a whole - and there are notable exceptions - demonstrates what Sir William Macpherson defines as institutional racism. This is clearly an untenable position to maintain.

'Holding Up the Mirror' makes the case for change on the basis of four arguments.

- Business case - There is a direct link between performance on diversity

(attracting a wider audience) and business success. London's demographic composition is changing fact. We are fast becoming an increasingly diverse society. The 2001 census revealed over 40% of Londoners belong to a black and minority ethnic group, and in one London Borough (Newham) the majority population are drawn from black and minority ethnic groups. The Draft London Plan suggests that the diversity of London's population will continue to increase.

- **Legal Case** - As we have noted previously, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a positive duty on all major public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. Similarly, the Local Government Act of 1999 makes a major impact on many museums. However, the legal case may be broadened usefully to include wider government objectives and to describe the general drive by government to address such issues as lifelong learning, social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal.

- **Ethical Case** - In part, at least, the Government's argument for reform in based upon ethical principles. In addition, the ethical case describes the pursuance of race equality and wider social inclusion as an extension of the ethical standards embraced by professional curatorship.

- **Intellectual Case** - This highlights the need to raise awareness of internal prejudice to ensure that contemporary museums are dynamically and culturally relevant.

In conclusion, and this is a conclusion we share, 'Holding up the Mirror' identifies the need for a step change in attitudes towards the cultural diversity throughout the museum sector. It highlights the needs for a strategic agency to pioneer and to force the pace of change, and to develop sustainable partnerships that will deliver that change. Achieving a successful diversity strategy is no easy matter. An increasingly sophisticated black and minority audience is becoming much more alert to cultural stereotyping, patronising displays and poor quality exhibitions[22].

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Street Survey Findings

INTRODUCTION

The street survey formed part of a wider research project to examine the reasons for low museum and gallery attendance amongst London's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and canvas their views on how museums might break down the barriers.

StUF interviewed 594 people in eight different areas across inner and outer London from 14th - 31st January 2004 with the primary aim of recruiting non-museum user participants for focus groups. In addition, the street surveys provided a valuable opportunity to gain an initial overview of general impressions of and attitudes towards museums.

METHODOLOGY

The street survey comprised structured face-to-face interviews with visible BME adults, each lasting 2-5 minutes. A copy of the questionnaire is contained in Appendix 1. The results were analysed using SNAP Professional software.

The eight separate survey sites were chosen to reflect the varying pattern of museum provision across London and assess whether individual museums had made a difference.

The survey sites were:

• Stratford Station and Green Street
• Wandsworth Shopping Centre
• Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre
• Ealing Broadway
• Dalston Kingsland Train Station
• Ealing Road - Wembley
• Whitgift Centre - Croydon
• Camden - High Street.

PARTICIPATION RATES

The survey sample is not a stratified sample either by age or ethnicity, so the respondents' profile does not truly reflect the demographic make-up of London. This was primarily due to time constraints on the project. There was a high proportion of young respondents because many elderly people were less willing than the under 40's to stop and voice their views. In some cases elderly respondents didn't speak good enough English to take part.

The cold weather and the explosion of clipboard-clutching charity workers also contributed to public indifference. Additionally, a survey about 'museums' was often not appealing enough to make many stop and take part. A common reply was 'you're asking the wrong person' or 'I don't know anything about them'. Overall the response rate was around 1 in 10 (10%).
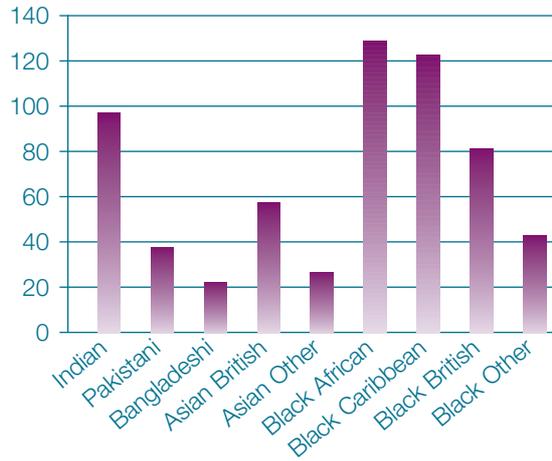
Gender:
• Male: 297 (50%)
• Female: 297 (50%)

Age:
• 16-25: 223 (38%)
• 26-40: 228 (38%)
• 41-60: 93 (16%)
• 60+: 50 (8%)

Ethnicity:

Ethnicity and Age:

	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Asian British	Asian Other	Black African	Black Caribbian	Black British	Black Other
16-25	38	16	12	18	5	43	44	32	7
26-40	34	12	8	23	12	55	41	34	12
41-60	8	7	1	10	5	20	24	15	6
60+	13	3	1	3	4	10	17	0	1

Further detail of participation rates is contained in Appendix 2.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the main findings from the street interviews. The topic areas covered by the survey were:

• Patterns of attendance
• Perceptions of museums
• Awareness of local museum provision
• Barriers
• Attractions

Patterns of attendance

The table below shows that 65% (386 people) of our survey sample could be classified as non-users of museums.
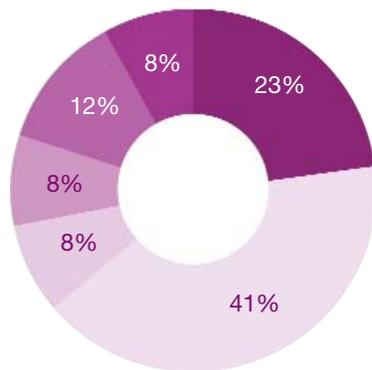
We asked participants: 'When was the last time you went to a museum?'

- ■ Never: 23%
- ■ Over Two Years ago: 41%
- ■ Over One Year ago: 8%
- ■ Within the Last Year: 8%
- ■ Within the Last 6 Months: 12%
- ■ Within the Last Month: 8%

A detailed analysis is contained in Appendix 3.

Other conclusions that can be drawn from the surveys are:

- There appears to be no difference between the sexes in terms of attendance.
- People with children above 5 years old appear more likely to visit museums than those adults without children.
- 70% of 16-25 year olds and 75% of those aged 60+ had not been to a museum in the last two years. This drops to 60% amongst 26-40 year olds and 58% amongst 41-60 year olds.

- 66% of all Asian groups had not visited a museum in the last two years compared to 70 % of Black Caribbean's and 75% of Black Africans. Of those classifying themselves as Black British 50% had not been to a museum in the last two years.

Perceptions

The survey shows that 63% of participants were either negative or indifferent about museums.

The single most common perception of museums is that they are concerned with history. For the majority of participants, this equated to something boring and irrelevant.

Respondents were asked what they thought of and associated with museums. Their replies can broadly be split into three categories:

Positive Perceptions:

- 20% thought museums were an interesting and good thing.
- 17% thought they were a good source of information and education.
- 2% thought of them primarily as entertainment.
- 2% thought of them as free.

Negative Perceptions:

- 14% thought museums were boring and were not interested.
- 7% had nothing to say or had not ever thought about museums.
- 2% thought of museums as costing too much to visit.

Associations: Non-definable perceptions

- 36% thought of history, heritage or the past - this was the most common answer.

- 20% thought of old things and antiques.
- 12% associated museums with Art.
- 7% associated them with Culture.
- 7% thought they were only for children and associated them with school trips.
- 4% associated them with specific exhibitions.

It is clear that the majority do not immediately have something positive to say about museums. 63% were either indifferent or negative in their response. Many had simply not thought about museums and so responded in a way that was either expected of them or to get the interview over and done with.

Frequent users (37%) quickly and willingly praised museums and gave the most individualistic responses.

The 36% that thought of 'history' and the 20% who mentioned 'old things' seemed, for the most part, to consider this history to be boring and irrelevant. The answer demonstrated a common perception of history that is reflected in a belief that museums are stuffy, irrelevant and stuck in the past. Clearly, many black and minority ethnic people do not feel engaged by mainstream history. This may be due to the style and nature of curriculum teaching or the current provision in museums, or a combination of both these factors.

Obviously, for frequent visitors and those interested in museums, 'history' and 'old things' had positive implications. This highlights the non-definable nature of some of the respondents' answers. However, for the most part, the word history was used pejoratively and suggested a sense of exclusion from this history.

Very few respondents' distinguished museums by theme or collection, defining them rather as a homogenous body of similarly unappealing institutions. The staunch Britishness of the national museums coloured people's perceptions of local museums as snobbish, self-important and exclusive.

The general perception of museums is that they are only concerned with the past. If they wish to attract a younger and more diverse audience they need to ensure their commitment to contemporary arts and culture is emphasised. It is clearly the presentation of recent history that museums need to concentrate on to involve members of London's BME communities.

Awareness of local museum provision

Participants were asked if they had heard of a museum in their local area (either a local history museum or an independent body). Out of those interviewed:

74% had not heard of any museum in their borough.

26% had heard of a museum local to them (both independent and local history).

8% had last visited a museum in their country of birth.

The first place that came to participants' minds was generally one of the national museums. This was probably due to their status in the local area (eg Geffrye Museum in Dalston) and the scope of their outreach programmes, particularly amongst local schools.

Where the Nationals dominate, awareness of local museums seems to be lower (e.g. Camden and Southwark). It is also likely that the specialist nature of the majority of smaller museums in the participants' local areas was a factor.

This explains answers to Question1 such as "Egypt" or "Science" or "Animals/Dinosaurs" - respondents thought of the British Museum or the South Kensington set.

Where local area museums occupy a prime location and concentrate on local history and culture, awareness is much higher (e.g. Wandsworth and Croydon). Such museums tend to be far more accessible than their specialist counterparts, both in terms of location and content.

Good awareness of a local museum did not necessarily mean high attendance figures. Many respondents had heard of the Grange in Brent, for example, but had not visited.

There is some evidence to suggest that popular local museums can act as a gateway to wider museum attendance. In Newham, for example, awareness of local museums and attendance at National museums were both low.

By contrast, museum attendance amongst respondents in Hackney and Croydon was considerably higher. Both these boroughs have established a "Cultural Quarter" where the museum can attract visitors using associated facilities such as a library or music venue.

The percentage of who had heard of their local museum is shown below.

Local museum awareness
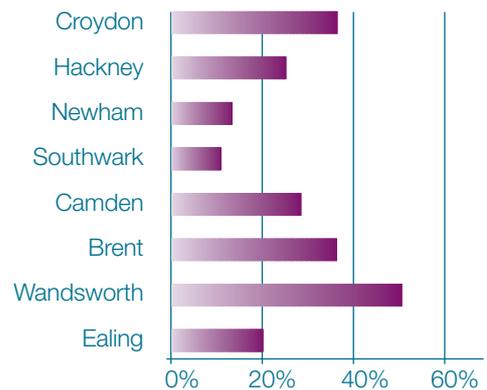
The 455 respondents who use museums were asked which museum they last visited. The majority had last visited one of the national museums. A large number of these visits were made over two years ago when people were still at school.

• British Museum: 20%
• Natural History Museum: 12%
• Science: 6%

The majority of those who had visited the Imperial War Museum, The Geffrye and the Museum of Childhood came from the local area.

• 8% had last visited a museum while abroad. The majority of these were visits made before moving to London from foreign countries, though a few respondents had visited a museum while on holiday.
• 10% could not remember the name of the last museum they went to. This suggests the visit was either a long time ago or hadn't made a significant impression.
• 5% of respondents' last visits were to a local museum.

Barriers

Those who were classified as non-users were asked for reasons why they hadn't visited a museum in the past two years (Base 386 - 65%).

Barriers

No. of respondents replying
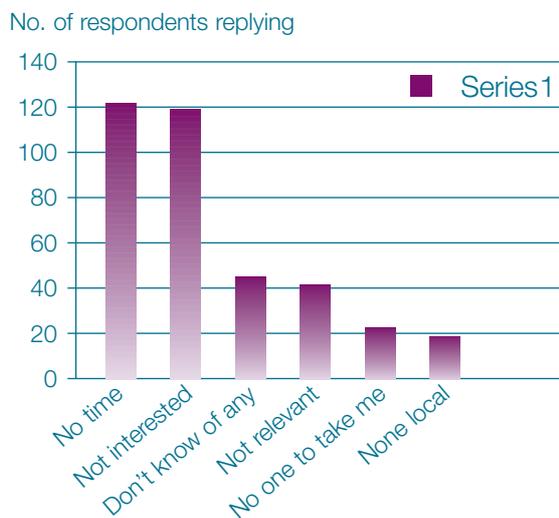
- No time: 31%
- Not interested: 31%
- Don't know of any/where they are: 12%
- Not relevant to my interests: 12%
- No one to take me: 6%
- None local/too far to town: 4%
- Other reasons: 4%

The common feeling seemed to be that 'museums are not for us' but rather the preserve of the white middle classes.

Museums were clearly associated with the formal learning of schools and other education providers rather than entertainment and an opportunity for informal and additional learning. In essence museums were associated with work i.e. school, research or academia. There was a distinct desire from many people to distance themselves from this style of learning.

Some respondents (around 5%) were relatively new to the country and didn't know London very well. They did not consider visiting their local museums to be a top priority. This point again reinforces the need to actively invite and direct people to museums.

Attractions

Respondents who were classified as users were asked to specify their main reason for visiting a museum (Base 208 - 35%). Although the survey was intended to assess non-user views, Holding up the Mirror recommended that both users and non-users from BME communities should be canvassed.

- 42% replied they visited for personal reasons: either entertainment or education.
- 40% went to a museum for the education of their children.
- 8% visited to see a specific exhibition.
- 10% had other reasons (e.g. to take visitors from abroad, as part of a school trip and to learn about British culture).

CONCLUSIONS

BME groups demonstrated a general lack of interest in museums and galleries. They were largely unwilling to take part in the questionnaire as they felt they had not much to say about issues in the sector. This is reflected by the generally indifferent or negative perceptions of the participants who associated museums with a history they viewed as boring.

Amongst the BME people who took part in the survey, attendance figures were quite low, as was awareness of local museums. Awareness of the National museums was much higher than local museums.

Just over a third had been to a museum in the past two years. A significant minority of these had visited museums in other countries, either in their place of birth or while on holiday.

The main barriers to attendance were lack of time (31%) and lack of interest (31%). 12% had considered visiting but felt museums were not relevant. The main reason for attendance was either personal interest or education.

Focus Groups Summary Findings

INTRODUCTION

Four focus groups were held from 8th to 14th February 2004.
The groups consisted of:

- Females 16-25 (3 people)
- Males 16-25 (9 people)
- Females 25-40 (7 people)
- Males 25-40 (7 people)

The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the views and attitudes of BME museum non-users. The topic guide concentrated on four broad areas:

- Attitudes to museums and galleries
- History and culture
- Barriers to attendance
- What participants would like to see in museums

There was a distinct difference in attitudes towards museums, galleries, history and culture between those in the groups who were born in this country and those who had moved here from abroad: those who had grown up here were far more likely to consider themselves to be British and be interested in British history (as well as the history and culture of other countries).

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Arising from the focus groups, the main priorities for improvements can be summarised as:

Better Communication and Customer Relations

- A guide and a friendly face at the museum
- An attractive and enticing outside appearance
- More publicity and advertising in the local area
- Links between museum - eg nationals to promote local museums to visitors
- Actively inviting people and letting them know what is on to encourage repeat visits

Access

- Local museums in all areas
- Different opening times and languages
- A cheap café to relax in
- Easy access - especially for local museums

Collections

- Changing displays
- Popular Culture on display
- Use music to attract people, especially young people
- Concentrate on immigration

ATTITUDES TO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

The groups all associated museums with history and galleries with contemporary culture and art. However, all groups felt that museums should also showcase contemporary culture.

Museums were generally associated with school trips, history lessons and formal learning. Group participants felt they had far better things to do with their free time. They also felt that the provision of history and culture on offer at museums is not relevant enough to attract more visitors.

A common theme across all groups was the belief that museums place too much emphasis on what they generally considered to be the most boring aspects of history in museums.

'War, War, War' and 'the more monotonous side of English culture' were fairly representative comments.

Many participants said that more emphasis needed to be placed on the present or the future. Museums were seen as 'stuck in the past' and not reflective of modern life. It was further felt that there should be more emphasis on what the groups considered to be the right aspects of culture in modern London.

'They're boring there's no variety, it's all just old English stuff.'

'All cultures are represented by their art.'

'Local culture should be exhibitions of African art made by local women.'

Another commonly held view was that adults 'have better things to do' than visit museums. The lack of local museums and the distance and effort involved with a day out to central London meant that the idea of a museum visit was associated with taking a long time out of one's week and leisure time. Visiting a museum was simply not convenient.

All the groups agreed that museums and galleries were great places for a family day out. They were seen as places for schoolchildren and old people, conjuring up memories of 'school trips and sandwiches'. For this reason, they weren't considered relevant to people who had left school or stopped studying history.

Museums are not somewhere people thought they would visit socially or with friends. Several of the groups thought that if people were actively invited in to museums, they would be more likely to visit. People were taken when they there were at school, but no one ever suggested they visit once they had left.

The groups felt museums were too formal with their uniformed guards and the 'look but don't touch' attitude. They were also seen as places for the white middle classes, an audience which is in a minority in the catchment areas of many of London's museums.

The groups thought that history and culture should be shown in museums whereas galleries existed to display only culture. Both museums and galleries were felt to be suitable homes for contemporary culture. Certain aspects of culture crossed the boundary between museums and galleries e.g. art and fashion.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

Focus group participants were asked to discuss their views and attitudes towards history and culture.

It was clear that attitudes towards museums can not be divorced from concepts of history and culture. Attitudes to the current provision of history are that it is boring and irrelevant.

History was felt to be something one was born with whereas people can adopt aspects of other cultures, e.g. in their music taste or dress sense. Both history and culture were thought to be handed down through the generations.

Participants wanted to see an emphasis on the development of relationships between Britain and other countries. This would be the basis for an 'open history' that portrayed many different histories and cultures.

Culture was defined as 'way of life' and incorporated elements such as dress, food, art and music. It was felt that history fed this culture, which could be seen in broader issues like marriage traditions or religious practices.

More specifically, the focus groups defined history as 'why am I here?'. It is not surprising then that participants would welcome a wider focus on immigration.

What also emerged from the groups was a possible divide amongst Black and Minority Ethnic communities. Their appeared to be distinction between second generation Asians and Blacks who had been born and schooled in the UK and felt a huge attachment to Britain, and those born in another country.

'I feel half British, half Jamaican.'

'It depends on how long you've been here.'

The participants who were born abroad were less likely to consider themselves to be British and more likely not to have English as a first language. This subgroup had even less desire to learn about British history than those who were born in the UK.

These findings highlight the personal nature of one's history. Culture is different for everyone so museums must explore themes that are common to all. A good example of this is the Hackney Museum where the collection focuses on immigration.

There were also generational differences between the young, who were surrounded by a cosmopolitan mix of cultures, and the older generations, who were more likely to isolate themselves with people of a similar cultural background.

The younger generations felt they had much to learn from their elders in terms of history and culture. There is, however, a wide generation gap which is reinforced by a western outlook amongst the young compared that is very different from the 'much more strict and religious' attitudes of the older generation.

In general, the groups' experience reflected the popular definition of London as a cultural melting pot. As one respondent said: 'People inherit the language, religion and food of their parents but they can adopt aspects of other cultures in their dress sense and music tastes.'

Thus the groups felt that if museums are to be relevant, they must concentrate on the

links and the development of relations between Britain and different countries. It is these links that have led to our diverse society with its many minority ethnic groups. Giving prominence to artifacts such as 'posters encouraging West Indian women to become nurses in England' would be one way to reflect these links.

It was also felt that museums had a role to play in promoting greater understanding of Britain's multicultural roots. For example, showing Commonwealth soldiers who fought in the War might help people understand that many minority ethnic groups were actually invited to become resident in the UK.

Furthermore, while the groups agreed that it was important to show the British in other countries, they felt it was equally important to show the same countries before they were colonised.

'To show this open history': 'White people are interested in our history, they should be and they are.'

All groups agreed that both history and culture should be displayed in museums, but felt this culture should offer contemporary reflections and interpretations of history. Culture and history were seen to be intertwined, each defining shaping and interpreting the other.

'Your history is part of your culture.'

Participants felt that while modern art from all cultures could be displayed in galleries, popular street culture could be shown in museums. All agreed it was important for museums to stress the contribution of BME communities and peoples in history as well.

'Art can represent any and all cultures especially those that do not have much written about them.'

Culturally, clothes and food are often the most obvious expressions of diversity. They are an easy way of showing and preserving a certain way of life. But there is also a single overriding theme that seems to unite the different black and minority groups. It was immigration that gave participants a central point of reference for their lives in Britain. This issue, they felt, deserves much more emphasis.

'The wars that led to partition and the break up of other countries also.'

'To understand why people are refugees and asylum seekers.'

'The British in India and what they did.'

The groups also stressed that history should not be whitewashed and that the story of those who came to this country by force needed to be told.

'Museums need to show and not hide how Britain has exploited people.'

'Museums should not be propaganda for Britain- they should admit mistakes.'

All groups felt that BME history was relevant to all people. They also agreed that it was important to understand both English history and the history of their parents' culture. Young people often straddle a cultural divide and are defined by a dual history (e.g. Black British). It is these young people who have the most to benefit from learning about where they come from.

The groups felt that their culture was much wider than the established arts.

For example, marriage ceremonies, religious ceremonies in fact any event involving BMEs was viewed as a cultural event because of the new interpretation they bring to it. Thus presentation of culture should involve those areas where BMEs are most represented and involved such as art, music and sport.

Culture and history were thought to evolve from the home and so it is important for museums to develop and aid this process between parent and child. However, several participants noted that neither their parents nor their school had made an effort to teach them about their history and culture. For these people, museums have a potentially vital role to play in promoting deeper self-understanding through access to history.

'My Dad would have never told me who Marcus Garvey was….unless it was the name of a race horse!'

The groups were all interested to learn about local celebrities and how they had made a name for themselves. This culture of celebrity interest is not necessarily new, but the obsession is a modern one. Young adults in particular relate and listen to famous faces they can identify with. This interest in and desire to preserve contemporary culture can also be seen in the explosion of collectables. Trainers from a few years ago have become cult classics, as have flyers from local raves or programmes from certain football matches. These objects may be contemporary, but they have immediately gained a legendary status in the eyes of young people, and the same can be said of famous faces.

BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE

The focus groups examined the main barriers to participation/attendance for non-users.

The image of museums is that that they are exclusive and far too specialist. Variety is needed both in collections and in their interpretation, and marketing needs to attract a wider audience. Popular culture, whilst not exactly highbrow, can be used to attract people and engage them in issues around past cultures and histories. Rightly or wrongly, the public perception of museums is that they only show the past. Ethnic Minorities also feel an alienation from many of these historical events as they played no part in them. Museums need to place more focus on influential modern trends and tastes.

The Asian participants were keen to stress the language barrier, particularly for the elderly and those who had recently come to the country. There is also an element of a postcode lottery with many people from outer London having fewer opportunities to visit museums both locally and centrally. The Commonwealth Museum (based in Kensington prior to relocation) was noted by several people for its interesting events and exhibitions. More generally, it was felt that BME history was not given adequate coverage.

The barrier that can be removed most easily is making BME groups feel more welcome in museums. Providing a warm welcome is an essential, yet simple step that shouldn't be difficult for museums to achieve. Signs or information in community languages can also help, but actively inviting people to step through its museum doors is the key to good access policies.

The main barriers highlighted by the focus groups were:

• Lack of encouragement/role models
• Attitudes to learning
• Lack of interest
• Publicity and relevance
• Language and intellectual barriers
• Lack of interaction
• Lack of acknowledgement/Issues around provenance
• Lack of time

'I'd only go to a museum if I was sightseeing I'd never go on my own.'

'They're always in really depressing buildings.'

'They don't attract you in.'

'They're for old people and young kids.'

'There's a stereotype around museums; that they're for geeks. They need to attract more normal people so they don't seem so boring.'

'There's nothing I'm interested in.'

'They need to concentrate on modern times: club culture.'

'Because you're forced to go at school, you don't feel like going now.'

'Black history is definitely of interest but people need to be directed there. More publicity is needed but that's not to say people shouldn't be directed to English history as well.'

Solutions: 'What would you like to see in museums?'

The focus groups were asked to consider what improvements museums could make and how they could become more relevant. They came up with a variety of suggestions and ideas.

The groups thought that museums could be used to show second generation BME people what life is like in their parents' country of origin. They could also highlight ways that different cultures have impacted on and been claimed by modern British society. One obvious example was fashion, with items such as bindis and mirrors becoming part of London style. The older participants, in particular, felt that second/third generation youngsters could benefit from a wider debate on these topics.

'Calvin Klein uses mirrors in his clothes - that's from saris.'

'There are many imitations of Western things in India and also vice versa.'

It was felt that museum staff should be more pro-active and knowledgeable, particularly those who have regular contact with the public.

All the groups were conscious that BME groups were not adequately represented at a senior level in the sector. It was widely agreed that the lack of diversity amongst museum managers undoubtedly had an influence on collections and policy.

The groups would like to see a more even representation of modern and 'olden' times. It was felt that recent history was a period of great change and upheaval, and people need to understand the events that have shaped their own lives and surroundings.

'To show how far we have come in modern times.'

It was agreed that displays should be multi-media and sensory. Models, maps and pictures were highlighted as being especially important, particularly models to show changes in the local area.

'They need to use computers more to get you interested.'

The focus groups were interested to hear about the first Black and Asian people to settle in this country. They suggested school photos could be used to show how faces have changed. They also wanted more focus on other cultures and civilisations in the school curriculum.

It was felt that local archaeology was essential. Showing what came from the ground locally was a seen as a good way to understand the development of an area.

The quality of museum exteriors was frequently mentioned. An attractive frontage showing people what was inside was seen to be a good way of encouraging participation. It was felt that buildings should have as many modern facilities as possible. All the groups thought computers were a useful way of attracting more people. The groups suggested they could be used for internet access and research into areas of further interest. This provision of information could extend across the arts with museums becoming cultural hubs that can direct people to other local events.

'The buildings are too bland, they don't attract you to come in, they don't have any signs.'

'The displays need to be varied and quirky; keeping young people captivated by their variety'

Participants thought museums need to ensure they are aware of the local demographic of their area in order to have the most relevant displays and exhibitions that truly leave a taste of the local flavour: distinctly local culture is a hybrid of the groups who have settled there along side those that have always been there. Language and food is often from one's parents but people can adopt many different cultures in their style and way of life.

'How people have lived here through the ages': 'To not forget old shops.'

The groups thought that museums could easily put money into the community through activities such selling local art. Galleries were thought of as being more commercial because they sell artwork, whereas the bigger museums need to demonstrate, in some form, the good work they are doing in their local community.

The commercial preoccupations of a young, urban society - such as trainers, mobile phones, finger nails and fashions - need to be considered by museums if they are to engage young people. How can this culture of materialism be viewed in an historical context?

It is worth noting that youth culture is not necessarily confined to an ethnic group or groups, but is rather a mix of multicultural views, styles and attitudes. Many of today's youth are generally familiar with other cultures' fashions and way of life because they are part of their own reality.

The younger age groups talked about being interested in local celebrities, again highlighting the desire to see contemporary culture in museums.

This celebrity fascination is another modern phenomenon that museums may choose to concentrate on when promoting their services. BME celebrities and academics could be important role models for people to identify with.

The focus groups felt they wanted to see comparisons between past and present. For example, older versions of everyday objects such as jewellry and other fashion items would be of interest, as would changes in food and diet.

All the focus groups, both young and old, agreed that Black and Asian music was popular throughout London. It was felt that a focus on this world-famous 'urban' (i.e. BME) scene would be very attractive. Music is the single biggest phenomenon among London's diverse minority groups. Music is something they can proudly claim ownership of and have an influence in. Many younger people define their culture by this music.

If museums wish to present a multicultural viewpoint of society they need look no further than London's club scene. Presenting this culture acknowledges and validates its contribution. Music evenings would be a big attraction. Bhangra is a mix of rural Punjabi beats with Western samples; Carnival and mas band music can show links with the West Indies and other counties; steel pan music has a direct link to the War as do Reggae lyrics.

'Music is what would attract me - Asian music is very fashionable right now.'

It was felt that contemporary arts could best be shown in cultural centres rather than museums. The focus groups thought a mixture of museum, library, gallery, archives and performance venue would be a great success in encouraging culture greater participation.

The groups also suggested that National museums could do more to direct people their local museum by providing more information. For example, small libraries containing prints and pictures of what other museums have to offer would encourage more people to visit.

It was agreed that there was not did not enough advertising in the types places that BME people might go. Museums may be able to connect to a more diverse audience by developing links with national embassies, local mosques and Gospel churches. Other important locations for posters and leaflets included Sixth Form Colleges, local shopping centres, leisure centres and ice rinks. In addition, literature should be available in different languages and demonstrate what people would get out of their visit.

'If they have Somalian exhibitions they should advertise in Somalian cafes.'

'On Eid my whole college shuts down, that's how many (Muslims) there are there, so museums should come to the College.'

Events that encouraged interaction with the older generations were thought to be a good idea, e.g. showing the youngsters how to cook. International days such as those celebrated in many schools could involve the popular attractions of national food and dress. Practical demonstrations

are always welcomed as are hands-on displays.

'They should have a food day when old people teach us to cook yard-style.'

'Museums should use people from abroad to explain things to people who live here - to show how other people present their cultures and to show them in a positive light.'

Participants all of ages and backgrounds felt there was a need for a specialist BME History museum. Black History month and the focus groups show that there is a huge interest in the provision of this history, but much more needs to be done to connect existing and future initiatives with target audiences.

This is why mailing lists and actively inviting people are so important. Museums need to become more aware of religious festivals and special anniversaries when whole communities come together. These can be ideal opportunities for targeted outreach work or opening up the building as part of festivities. Simply acknowledging these festivals will send out a message that museums are embracing multicultural society as well as involving some audience participation.

'Borrow from museums back home and in central London.'

'The exhibitions need to change so you return there.'

'They should have international days like at school which focus on certain countries and their food and clothes.'

CONCLUSIONS

In all the groups there was evidence of a definite divide between those who were born in this country and those who had moved her from overseas. Those born here generally considered themselves to be (at least half) British, yet were less well informed about their parents' culture and country than those who had moved here.

As the elder groups in particular agreed, it was these second and third generation BME youngsters who could potentially benefit most from a more inclusive view of British history. This history should be open and tell the story of those who have come to this country both willingly and by force. As far as the focus groups were concerned, the history of BME communities meant the history of immigration.

The participants associated museums with history and the past, whereas galleries were associated with contemporary culture and art. However, it was felt that museums could also play a part in presenting modern culture. Culture was thought to be fairly wide-ranging for the groups and incorporated everything from food and fashion to weddings and religious ceremonies. Celebrity culture was frequently touched upon as something that would attract a lot of interest.

Group participants felt they had much better things to do with their time, particularly as the provision of history and culture on offer at museums is not relevant enough to attract more visitors. The groups felt museums concentrated on the wrong aspects of history such as war.

Museums were recognised as great places for a family day out and were thought to be

primarily for younger audiences. Visiting a museum with friends or to socialise, was simply not something people would choose to do.

There have been many previous studies done into barriers to attendance. Barriers for our focus group participants reflected previous research and included:

- Lack of encouragement/role models
- Attitudes to learning
- Lack of interest
- Not enough publicity and relevance
- Language (particularly for those new to the country and elderly Asians) and intellectual barriers
- Lack of interaction and varying displays
- Lack of acknowledgement/ Issues around provenance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the research project was to find out why black and minority ethnic Londoners do not, as a rule, visit museums, and to seek out their views on how museums can break down those barriers to attendance. It follows on from the work conducted by Helen Dennison Associates for the London Museums Agency and published as the report 'Holding Up the Mirror' in October 2003. The report concluded that London's black and minority ethnic communities are getting a 'raw deal' from the museums sector. Despite the fact more than one in three residents in London now belongs to a black and minority ethnic community, less than one out of every five visits to a museum is made by a black and minority ethnic person.

All of this has been known for over thirteen years - ever since the publication of 'Dingy Places' in 1991. What should be of concern to anyone who cares about our museums, and who believes in their importance to the cultural life of the capital, is the lack of progress that has been made in encouraging more black and minority ethnic people to use their services. In any other area of public service, this would be described in the words of Sir William Macpherson as 'institutional racism'. Despite some evidence of good practice in a few museums, across the museum sector as a whole there has been little systematic or effective engagement with London's black and minority ethnic communities. We believe that a major factor behind this persistent failure is insufficient awareness of the specific needs and preferences of a black and ethnic minority audience.

The research project then had six main aims. These were:

- To explore what black and minority ethnic people may identify as the barriers to them using museums and galleries and their services.
- To explore how black and minority ethnic people think those barriers could be tackled.
- To explore the role that black and minority ethnic people think museums could and should play in today's diverse society.
- To identify good examples from the experience of black and minority ethnic people of perceived good practice within museums.
- To provide the London Museums Agency with comprehensive findings of why black and minority ethnic communities do not use London museums more and to elicit their views on how museums can break down those barriers.
- To identify the actions that the museum sector needs to take to address the needs of black and minority ethnic people and to make recommendations on what the London Museums Agency, and the successor regional agency (ALM London) need to do to support museums in addressing those issues.

The methodology for the project entailed both primary and secondary research. The secondary research consisted of a literature review in order to frame the context for the fieldwork in the primary research phase. The fieldwork employed street interviews

and focus groups. The main purpose of the street interviews was to recruit and sift participants from visible black and ethnic groups (VBMEs) to the four focus group sessions, but the street interviews also provided an opportunity to survey attendance patterns and to carry out some preliminary attitudinal testing. The focus groups were designed to explore those 'attitude issues' in more depth, examining barriers to engagement (actual and perceived), awareness and perceptions, interests and motivations, and finally attitudes to learning because of the strong association between museums and education.

Although not the intention, in practice the research has focused upon VBME's between the ages of 16 - 40. The younger age profile reflects the fact that far fewer older people were willing to stop for the street interviews, and were less likely to speak good enough English to be able to take part. Thus we had a much smaller pool of older potential recruits from the street survey and this proved an insufficient number to be able to organise focus groups. Generally, contact rates in the street survey were low, with only one in ten people willing to participate. A common response was "you're asking the wrong person" or "I don't know anything about museums".

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Over the course of the street survey, 594 VBME people were interviewed at eight different locations across London. The street survey confirmed findings from previous surveys like the 1989 Arts Attitudes Survey (quoted in 'Dingy Places'). Results are compared in the table below:

Table 1 Proportion defined as non-visitors all categories

	Arts Attitude Survey (1989)	Telling it like it is (2003)
White	56%	N/A
Asian	67%	66%
Black	78%	65%

There appears to have been some movement in the attendance patterns of the Black group. Our research suggests that this is restricted to the category of Black British.

Table 2 Proportion defined as non-visitors Black categories

	Telling it like it is (2003)
Black British	50%
Black Caribbean	70%
Black African	75%
Black average	65%

The biggest barrier to attendance appears to be perceptual, in that most of the respondents (63%) hold negative views of, or at best were indifferent to museums. This was generally because of the association of museums with a subject matter, which, despite television make-overs by the likes of Simon Schama and David Starkey, is still viewed as boring and irrelevant. The claims that history is the new rock and roll seem just a trifle overblown! Awareness of local museums - and one might have expected a closer connection with the local community - is also low, with 74% of those interviewed saying that they did not know of the existence of a museum within their Borough. But whilst many are put off by the didactic nature of museums, the educational experience does attract

those who we would term as active learners and parent with children.

The four focus groups examined those barriers to engagement in more detail. Recruitment to them was carried out from the street survey, and the focus groups consisted of: female 16-25; male 16-25; female 25-40; and male 25-40. All of them contained a broadly representative mix of VBME groups.

Whilst no major variations of views or experiences were apparent between the focus groups (age or gender dynamics appear to be of little significance), within them observable difference in attitude were clearly discernable between first and second-generation immigrants. Thus, those who were born and who grew up in the UK were far more likely to consider themselves to be British and were much more likely to be interested in British history than those who had moved here from abroad. Of course, the constituent factors of personal and cultural identity are contingent and complex; and the existence of generational divide within the BME community reflects the different degrees of separation and attachment to their country of origin and the country of arrival. Nonetheless, the focus groups reinforce the sense in which there are unique and distinctive features to what can be generally termed Black heritage, and these can be held to come out of a dislocation of people from place that is the legacy of British imperialism. It is around the experiences of immigration and racism that a unifying and abiding interest can be held to reside. Moreover, there is an unease about the doubtful provenance of many museum collections and the associations with conquest and exploitation.

Some key themes to emerge from the focus groups were:

• Museums have a strongly negative association with history - the way it is constructed and depicted within British culture, and how it is taught in schools. Too much emphasis is placed upon what are considered to be the boring aspects of history: kings and queens, wars, etc. Museums focus too heavily on a white, middle-class view of the past.
• Museums do not reflect contemporary life. They should concentrate more on the recent past and popular culture.
• Museums are of little relevance to black and minority ethnic communities.
• Low levels of awareness of the existence of museums (especially local museums) and the services they provide.

All the focus groups stressed a distinction between history, culture and heritage. History is something you are born with; whereas culture is something that can be changed and adopted. If notions of history are tied intrinsically to a sense of place and past, then those of culture are more reflective of relations between people and are therefore located in the present. For the participants, heritage has a much broader and inclusive cultural meaning, embodying elements like language, religion, community customs and traditions, fashion, art, music and sport; this was in contrast to more traditional static and object based associations. Museums, through past curatorial practices, are overwhelmingly 'object-oriented'. Our focus group participants argued that if they are to attract black and ethnic minority audiences they must become what we would term more 'relationship-centred'.

Museums concentrate upon the collection, preservation and display of physical objects within the conventions of accepted historical narratives. Yet for immigrant communities, their experience of place and past is one of profound disruption. Immigration, by definition, is an experience of dislocation, which persists across generations, and one that gives rise to fundamental and unsettling questions about identity. Even more so, when for many of our black and minority ethnic communities, the cause of that displacement entailed a greater or lesser extent of coercion. The challenge for the museum sector must be then to promote and foster better linkages between people, place and the past. Our focus groups suggest that establishing that greater sense of connection has a critically important reparative function for our society as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The lack of progress made in the last ten years or so in raising museums attendance figures of black and minority ethnic groups suggests that there needs to be a fundamental review, firstly of the purpose and role of museums in order that they become more relevant to the needs of an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse, consumer oriented and rapidly changing society. Secondly, any such review will have to address the institutional barriers that are inhibiting any real or sustainable changes in the sector. But this is obviously beyond the brief of this report.

Instead, we have concentrated upon more practical areas of change. Much of the ground has already been covered by other reports, dating back to Dingy Places. What

is new, though, is the evidence we have found of a widening generational divide within black and minority ethnic communities, and the emergence of more fluid and creative forms of identity amongst second and third generation immigrants. Those issues of cultural preservation, assimilation and reinterpretation inform the debate of what it means to be British, and require a set of more flexible and appropriate responses from the museums sector than may have been the case in the past.

We have grouped our recommendations into main areas of action:

a) Developing and reinterpreting collections: making the product more relevant to black and minority ethnic communities

Throughout the report we have argued that the museum sector needs to have a much more sophisticated understanding of the needs and interests of black and minority ethnic communities and to appreciate that these are not fixed or static. Therefore all museums should:

- Build up and maintain effective profiles of the potential black and minority ethnic audience base through intelligent application of demographic data. The London Plan predicts a continuing growth in the diversity of London's population, and the museum sector needs to respond more positively and quickly to this changing demographic landscape.

- Consider the relevance of the current interpretation of collections to black and minority ethnic communities. Our focus groups suggest that there was a large amount of interest in the changing nature of British society, and its relationships

with other countries in the world, particularly in recent years. The presentation of past and present side by side would help in promoting understanding and awareness of the scale, nature and significance of such cultural shifts.

- Focus more on people rather than place. Our focus groups were interested in their immediate neighbourhoods primarily in relation to their patterns of settlement. All the participants were interested in the first pioneering black and minority residents of an area, and the role of black and minority ethnic people played in local historical events. The way in which host and immigrant cultures interact and assume new forms and identities was considered to be of particular importance, and that this should not be homogenised or 'made safe'. Nevertheless, cultural diversity should be presented and promoted in a sensitive and positive fashion.

- Make their collections more diverse and more relevant.

- Create temporary exhibitions, take displays out into the community, and extend loans.

- Present an inclusive form of British identity and history. We have conceptualised this as an 'open history'. Open histories encourage linkages, connections and comparisons. More needs to be done to promote wider understanding, and black and minority ethnic history should not be 'ghettoised'.

- Relate to collections more directly to current issues of importance to black and minority ethnic groups: questions of citizenship, understanding why people become refugees and asylum seekers, the dynamics of immigration. The 'why am I here' question.

- Have a stronger emphasis on contemporary culture and recent history. The past is indeed a foreign country for most black and minority ethnic communities.

- Consider how they can achieve engagement with the emotions and feelings of visitors through the use of video, audio and tactile displays and more interactive features (what is called 'polysensuality').

b) Better communications: building a bigger market

Our street survey and focus groups showed that most people simply are not aware of the existence of any local museum provision. The highest levels of recognition were when local museums were located with other cultural or learning facilities. Much more needs to be done to identify new audiences and to employ a variety of marketing mechanisms to attract new audiences. The museums sector should be marketed as a whole, as well as individual museums marketing their own activities. A higher profile marketing strategy, employing a range of different media, should be developed by ALM London, to raise public awareness. Specific one off events could include an open museums week and/or a local history week co-ordinated across the museum sector with a suitable programme of events.

All museums should:

- Raise awareness of the museum sector as a whole by signposting to other facilities/venues.

- Produce publicity targeted towards different black and minority ethnic communities and age groups, and ensure

that it is distributed widely including non traditional venues.

- Ensure that all publicity materials positively reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of London and avoid stereotyping.

- Consult potential audiences on all aspects of museum services and publicity by establishing appropriate consultative mechanisms.

- Review and monitor user databases, invite lists and membership schemes to ensure that they are representative of the local community and actively promote equality issues.

- Ensure that exhibitions relevant to a particular community are promoted appropriately.

- Actively invite a wider range of audiences through events, other activities and celebrity openings.

- Encourage family activities and life-long learning.

- Display a commitment to a wider range of contemporary arts and culture, and create stronger linkages between the past and the present.

- Have local champions within the community to promote awareness and act as ambassadors for the museum sector.

- Emphasise the value of visiting and the fact of free entry.

- Raise the visibility of museums through effective signage, advertising and external displays.

- Use ICT to reach out to a wider audience.

- Encourage a 'drop by' approach.

c)   A stronger commitment to diversity - improving customer relations

Bluntly, most black and minority ethnic people think that museums are simply not for them. A variety of barriers to access have been identified. Museums are still widely regarded as the preserve of the white, middle-class, catering almost exclusively for their tastes and interests. Our research suggests that black and minority ethnic groups have a wider conception of heritage that embraces a much more extensive range of cultural forms and traditions. The museum sector needs to become more adept at tapping into and reflecting black and minority ethnic cultural practice and relating this to what we have termed 'home, hearth and history'.

All museums should:

- Consult with and actively involve local black and minority ethnic communities.

- Present a more inclusive form of identity by acknowledging in a more balanced way (which involves presenting a range of different and often competing perspectives) Britain's links and historical relationships with other countries.

- Forge stronger links with local community groups (including faith groups) to attract new users.

- Promote activities at black and minority ethnic cultural events.

- Be aware of the calendar of activities within black and minority communities (festivals, anniversaries, etc) and seek to develop participatory events.

- Promote citizenship programmes relevant to London's increasingly diverse population for all residents.

• Employ staff from a diversity of backgrounds to ensure that they are more representative of London's black and minority ethnic communities.

d) Partnership working.

There is growing pressure on museums to extend and build upon their traditional curatorial functions in order to fulfil their main purpose of public education and developing cultural literacy in Britain today. Life-long learning is the key to unlocking the door to skills, employment and opportunity, and it is about both individual and community development. Museums should be 'a resource for public learning of exceptional educational, social, economic and spiritual value - a common wealth. This wealth is held in trust by museums for the public good, not just for our own time and society but for all times and people's'.

The increasingly complex and varied demands being placed upon the museum sector require new ways of working. Museums have to look beyond the walls of their institutions to become much more actively involved in a range of different partnerships with other actual and potential stakeholders in order to engage effectively with the government agendas on lifelong learning, neighbourhood management and social exclusion. One example of how services can be linked together is the Ideas Stores strategy[1] in Tower Hamlets, which houses lifelong learning and cultural attractions together in purpose built and attractively designed building in local shopping areas. Our research shows that local museums co-located with other facilities have significantly higher attendance figures. The entertainment and retail industries have long appreciated the multiplier effects of clustering.

Partnership working is, of course, more than placing facilities together: it requires an alignment of organisational agendas, greater openness and transparency, and a sharing of information and knowledge.

ALM London should:

• Do more to promote the value created by local museums to statutory, voluntary and private organisations, particularly those acting as umbrella organisations and regional or sub-regional bodies, and engage more effectively with the relevant pan London networks.

• Work more closely with London local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships to develop cultural diversity strategies that incorporate local museums.

• Work more closely with the local museums to build their capacity to develop stronger links with regeneration partnerships (e.g. New Deal for Communities) and to contribute more effectively to regeneration programmes that are tackling social exclusion and deprivation.

• Encourage better partnership working between libraries and museums, and in particular to develop the use of libraries as venues for museum exhibitions.

• Strengthen arrangements for museums to collaborate more effectively on joint projects.

• Build the entrepreneurial capacity of local museums.

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[1] Another lesson to be drawn from the Ideas Stores strategy is the effort that was invested in developing a strong brand identity for the concept, the extensive marketing strategy that was adopted, and the importance placed upon building local support for the schemes.

- Ensure that all museums are aware of the relevant guidance concerning cultural diversity and equal opportunities.
- Collect, collate and monitor patterns of museum attendance and employment to ensure that progress is made in achieving diversity targets.
- Promote the establishment and promotion of cultural quarters.

Museums should:

- Develop stronger partnership working arrangements with local black and minority ethnic groups (e.g. supplementary schools, arts and cultural organisations, pensioners associations).
- Consult with local schools and the local communities to supplement the national curriculum around local history and in particular black and minority ethnic history needs.
- Ensure that collections are linked to the requirements of the national curriculum.
- Build stronger links with their appropriate local authority and Local Strategic Partnership body and to develop programmes of outreach work in collaboration with them.
- Ensure that they maintain good knowledge of what is happening in other museums and promote those events more widely.

CONCLUSIONS

London's two hundred plus museums play an important role not only in the social, economic and cultural life of the capital but also for the nation as a whole. They are one of the main reasons why London attracts 30 million visitors annually. More importantly, London's museums tell us a lot about ourselves as Londoners, helping us make sense of our individual histories and identities within some kind of shared framework of collective experience. The development of that shared framework is an endeavour fraught with difficulty, necessitating the negotiation of complex and sometimes conflicting historical accounts and backgrounds in order to achieve a broader understanding of our common present. As defined by the Museums Association, museums are 'institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artifacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.' One of our central arguments is that museums must move beyond the purely material approach to embrace other forms off cultural experience in order to capture and more accurately represent London's rich past and diverse present.

We cannot escape the fact that we live in a society largely driven by the imperatives of the market and consumer relations, where the mass media is critical in informing and determining individual preference and purchasing behaviours. This leads some to view museums simply as part of the entertainment industry, competing with many other attractions for audience share in a world of ever widening choice (and yet one with an increasingly restricted time within which to exercise that choice). Whilst the museums sector needs to be aware of commercial realities, and to

absorb the lessons from the private sector, museums are much more than another branch of Disney World.

For, as we have already noted, museums and galleries have a much deeper civic relevance. At this most fundamental level, their collective institutional weight help ground local and national identity within some notion of a shared, collective past and a common set of present day values - what, in other words, it means to be British. The importance that museums have in the cultural life of our country rests precisely in the search for identity in a confusing, often conflicting and rapidly changing world. This search for and construction of identity cannot be left in the hands of a privileged few and must become part of all or our inheritance. Thus, museums are, at the one and the same time, agents of social consolidation and agents of social change.

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