

TAKING MUSEUMS OVER

Kids in
MUSEUMS



REPORT 2012

ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

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ENGLAND**

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‘I THINK MUSEUMS AREN’T SO BORING ANY MORE’

REPORT INTO CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES OF TAKEOVER DAY 2012

Takeover Day 2012 was the biggest yet. Over 1800 children from 85 museums, galleries, historic homes and science centres had an amazing opportunity to be in charge for the day. Funded by Arts Council England and working in partnership with the Children’s Commissioner for England, Kids in Museums supported and encouraged heritage organisations to take part.

In 2011, museums told us of the many benefits they had experienced from involving children and young people in this way; in 2012 we wanted to know more about what impression the experience had left on the children.

HOW DID TAKEOVER DAY CHANGE WHAT CHILDREN THOUGHT ABOUT MUSEUMS?

The museum worked with two classes of Year 6 pupils in the lead-up to Takeover Day to train them as gallery hosts, researching gallery stories and presenting them to visitors on the day. Mind maps were used to ask the children what they thought about visiting museums before and after the event to see if the experience had influenced their opinion of museums.

Before Takeover Day, although most children were positive about museums, there were plenty of negative comments, mainly that museums were 'boring'. After Takeover Day, not only had the number of positive comments almost doubled, but the ratio of positive to negative significantly increased from 2:1 to 14:1. The number of children who had anything negative to say about museums was more than halved after taking part and 100% of children had something positive to say. Before their involvement with the museum, the children's responses were quite varied, from talking about what kinds of artefacts there are in museums, to which kind of museums they prefer. After Takeover Day there were hardly any of these kind of comments, with the children much more interested in expressing how great they thought museums were – 'amazing, really fun, interesting, inspiring'. Several children made comments that they wanted to visit more museums and specifically the Museum of London Docklands again.

Before their involvement with MoLD, lots of children had clearly made up their mind about certain types of museums being interesting or boring and some volunteered quite detailed explanations for why that was. Sometimes this was linked to the collection – statues and Science interactives are cool, rocks are not. However, often the children offered a traditional view of museums being passive places, with a focus on being shown and told things rather than doing. There was no feeling of ownership, that they could do and discover things for themselves.

After their Takeover Day experience, no children made these kind of comments and the focus was much more on what they could do in a museum e.g. filming, working in the workshop, talking to visitors, acting. There were several comments about people, highlighting the importance of human interaction in their experience.

'I want to visit more museums but mostly this one.'

'If I could choose what museum to go to again I will choose this one.'

'It's boring because sometimes you just sit there'

'I also think museums are not enjoyable because all you do is listen to people giving lectures'

'It was fun acting. My best part was exploring'

'Looking after a piece of the museum'

'You have nice staff'

What was a common element of both the pre-visit and post-visit mind maps was that the children had a clear idea that the purpose of museums was to learn about new things. What was slightly different between the two sets of data was the way they talked about learning. Before Takeover Day lots of children tended to see museums as something slightly abstract, provided for the benefit of others – ‘Museums are good when you want to learn stuff’, whereas afterwards they tended to put themselves at the centre and talk much more about their own learning – ‘I learnt a lot about history’. Although the aim of Takeover Day is not necessarily for children to learn about collections, this does seem to have become an outcome, and moreover it is seen as something valuable and enjoyable by the children.

Another slight difference was in the children’s view of what learning means. Before Takeover Day many said that museums were for learning ‘historical facts’, afterwards their responses were much broader, even including things that they had learned about themselves.

Before Takeover Day there was little indication from the children that they would visit a museum for any reason other than to learn something. Afterwards they talked less about what a museum is for and more about their own enjoyment of visiting museums. The Takeover Day experience was clearly a surprise to some children and not what they were expecting from their visit. This change in their perception of museums could explain their increased enjoyment of the visit.

‘It is fun because you learn lots of information’

‘I really enjoyed the museum because I got to learn different things’

‘Can change your opinion about a lot of stuff’

‘At first (I) wasn’t confident but now I’m really (confident) with your help.’

‘I learned about history but also I learned about if you join along it will be fun’

‘It was much more fun than I thought it would be’

‘Before I came to the museum I wasn’t looking forward to it but I did find it fun’

WHAT MADE TAKEOVER DAY SPECIAL FOR CHILDREN?

Over 60 children from a local primary school were invited to take over a variety of tasks for the day. Some gave guided tours, others filmed and interviewed visitors about their experience. Some worked in the shop and in front of house jobs, others prepared information for the press. Afterwards they were asked to write about what they had done on Takeover Day and about their 'best bits'.

All of the children were positive about their experience and found it easy to describe what they had done and the tasks they had enjoyed most. When asked to describe their roles on Takeover Day, many of the children went beyond simple reporting of the facts and talked about how the experience had made them feel. Fun, exciting, enjoyable, busy, nervous, were all words used.

The most significant element to emerge from the children's comments was how much they had enjoyed human interaction, from interviewing and observing visitors to conversations with members of the Wallace Collection's team. More children said that one of their favourite parts of the day was working with the museum staff and visitors than any other task assigned to them.

Even those who did not get the chance to lead a tour themselves commented that they had enjoyed watching their friends leading a tour. Perhaps related to this is another finding; a fairly high number of children said one of their favourite parts of the day was seeing specific artworks and galleries. Given that this is not necessarily an intended outcome of Takeover Day it does say something about how inviting young people to take the lead in museums can bring the collection to life not just for them but for their peers too.

The fact that the museum was prepared to hand over a degree of responsibility, no matter how seemingly small to an adult, clearly had a big impact on the children. Even fairly unchallenging jobs like unwrapping stock or holding a door open for visitors took on a whole new meaning when asked to do this in a new environment. They especially liked it when they felt they had been chosen to do a particular job and ones which were perceived to be adults' jobs normally. The children's comments showed that they had taken this responsibility seriously and were prepared to give their commitment to the museum in return.

'I handed out floorplans and quizzes. Doing it was really fun. I was thrilled and nervous when I did an announcement with my friends. I also opened the door, I was happy because they were satisfied.'

'I had a special job to interview the public. I asked them what their views were on this special day for kids. They all thought it was brilliant. I interviewed the Director of the museum. How great is that.'

*(What were the best bits?)
'Seeing the turn up of people',
'Listening to the cheer at the end',
'Making a friend or two in the public',
'Getting to meet people'*

'When they called me to do the pricing job I felt more grown up.'

'On Takeover Day it was the best thing I ever done in my life because me, Rome and Alessandro put on the price tag. After Rome went to hold the door, while he was doing that we wrote an announcement to speak and I felt nervous.'

The children clearly enjoyed the practical tasks, the most popular being pricing items in the shop, making announcements and writing information for the press. However, their comments indicated that they also enjoyed the mental challenges associated with the museum, from persuading the press to come and visit to analysing visitors' comments and behaviour to see what they liked and didn't like. Many children showed they really cared about what visitors thought of the museum. By exposing the children to these type of challenges they are starting to build a deeper connection and empathy with the work of the museum.

'On museum Takeover Day I felt excited because it was like I had a real job.'

'We had to say our lines loudly and clearly so that everyone could hear in the audience. It was great fun because you get to learn from other people.'

(What were the best bits?) 'Watching how they browse the museum.'

SUMMARY

Children and young people's participation in heritage organisations is gathering steam and Takeover Day provides a focussed campaign to encourage, support and celebrate this. Although a very small study, the findings in this report echo what museums all over the country are finding: that working alongside children and giving them meaningful roles and responsibilities results in a tremendously positive, personal experience and a lasting connection with the museum. The fantastic organisations that take part in Takeover Day are creating a generation of children who value their heritage, understand and appreciate the work of the museum. Most importantly, they see museums as a place for them and want to come back.

CASE STUDIES

- 1 FORDINGBRIDGE MUSEUM, HAMPSHIRE
- 2 FALMOUTH ART GALLERY, CORNWALL
- 3 THINKTANK, BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE MUSEUM
- 4 MUSEUM OF LONDON DOCKLANDS
- 5 PITT RIVERS MUSEUM AND OXFORD UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
- 6 THE GEFFRYE MUSEUM, LONDON

CASE STUDY I

FORDINGBRIDGE MUSEUM

HAMPSHIRE

Why take part?	<p>A completely volunteer-run museum, one of the volunteers has a background in education and is passionate about proactively involving children in History. The museum volunteers put in a lot of effort to maintain and open the museum and felt it would be a rewarding experience for them to see the museum being accessed by a young audience.</p>
Who took part?	<p>22 Year 6 pupils. One of the museum volunteers sent emails to local primary schools and made follow up calls until a school responded.</p>
What did they do?	<p>The museum is normally closed during the winter months. On Takeover Day the children organised a special opening and guided visitors around.</p>
How did they spend their time on the day?	<p>An initial meeting between teachers and museum volunteers helped identify areas of the museum that the children could be responsible for and tasks they could undertake.</p> <p>Museum volunteers visited the school to explain the challenge to the children. They provided information and stories about the town and exhibits and the pupils also carried out their own research.</p> <p>A rota was organised by the school so that the children had the opportunity to try all the roles and talk to visitors about different exhibits. Some of the children dressed in Victorian costumes provided by the museum from its collection of dressing up clothes.</p>
What happened next?	<p>Getting visitors on a day that was in the museum's closed season presented a challenge. The children invited their relatives to visit and the event was publicised in the media and around the town. As a result the museum received over 60 visitors in two hours, many of whom had not been to the museum before. Visitor comments were very positive and an unexpected bonus was that visitors were particularly generous with donations on the day.</p> <p>The school was extremely pleased with the day and asked about repeating the experience before they had even got back on the bus. The museum has loaned the school some items to use with pupils and intend to have more contact during the course of the year. Pictures drawn by the children were displayed at the museum's Christmas open day.</p> <p>The museum volunteers are keen to run more Takeover Days and offer the opportunity to other schools as well.</p> <p><i>'The best part of the day for us was when the children, without prompting or encouragement, told us how much they had enjoyed the day. Two of them said to me that it was the best out of school activity they had had and the teachers reported that the children were "buzzing" when they got back to school.'</i></p>

CASE STUDY 2

FALMOUTH ART GALLERY

CORNWALL

Why take part?	The gallery had recently begun work on a project to create three new pieces of outdoor play equipment for the town, inspired by their collection of automata. Having taken part in Takeover Days in the past, the Director was keen to develop new ways of involving children and saw this as an opportunity to give the children ownership of the project they were working on.
Who took part?	216 children from a pre-school and local primary schools. The children visited the gallery in groups of approximately 30 over a period of two weeks to take part in the Takeover Day experience.
What did they do?	The children were invited to experiment with different designs of automata and make decisions about how the finished pieces of outdoor automata would look and function, working with the gallery staff and artists who would go on to build the finished items.
How did they spend their time on the day?	Each group spent half a day in the gallery following roughly the same format: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handling session exploring extensive collection of automata• Studying the various mechanisms involved in each and making their own using cheaply sourced automata kits and other simple equipment e.g. mdf cams and chopsticks• Feeding back to the artist what they wanted to see and be able to do with the outdoor automata
What happened next?	<p>Using the feedback from the children, the artists are currently constructing the new outdoor automata which are due for installation in May 2013. All of the children will be invited to the launch event at the park which will be staged by the local residents association which is a partner in the wider project. In the meantime, the gallery has noticed many of the children returning with their families to show them the automata in the gallery and talk about what they did on Takeover Day.</p> <p>The workshop format developed was so successful that the gallery plans to make them a regular activity and has found that this experience has helped them to develop their practice and offer for schools. By creating a learning opportunity linking to the Science and Design Technology curricula the gallery has found a strategy to reach new school audiences and give them access to their collection.</p>

Why take part?	The museum was planning a collaborative project for around this time. Staff wanted to link in with Takeover Day as it was felt this would give the children validation for their work and show how seriously the museum appreciated their involvement. With a new Participation Co-ordinator in post, involving young visitors was a priority for the museum.
Who took part?	Five 11-13 year olds. For Takeover Day the museum partnered with a local charity called 'The Feast' which works to create community cohesion between young Christians and Muslims in Birmingham. The Participation Co-ordinator looked at a number of children's organisations in the city and found that this group were best placed to work on the project. Spanning different ages and from a non-Science organisation they could also bring a new perspective to the task.
What did they do?	The group worked with museum staff to co-create a permanent family activity for the new 'We Made It' gallery which was due to open in February 2013.
How did they spend their time on the day?	<p>The group were given two main tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the morning, they looked at a variety of possible artefacts and selected the handling objects they would most like to see in the gallery. The children indicated their choices and reasons using post-it notes that they attached to photos of the objects on large wall displays. • In the afternoon, they were asked to test prototype demonstrations to see if they worked and come up with improvements. Exploring lightboxes, minerals and electrical circuits, the group trialled demonstrations and provided feedback, both in writing and verbally. <p>The group were also taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of the new gallery in development.</p>
What happened next?	<p>The feedback provided on the handling objects and prototype demonstrations was used by the museum staff to create the finished activity – a 'Sense Station' mobile handling and activity unit which is now part of the 'We Made It' gallery. The children were invited to visit the museum again for the launch of the new gallery and to see their finished activity. A particular highlight was seeing their photos and comments displayed next to the objects they had selected.</p> <p>This was the first time that the museum had run a co-created project and staff were pleasantly surprised by the children's input, selecting unexpected items and coming up with fresh activity ideas. As a result the museum has committed to carrying out more collaborative projects with young people and an additional spin off has been the creation of a Young People's Forum to enable this.</p> <p><i>'Takeover Day has helped us to formally display that as a museum we are focused on involving children and young people in our work.'</i></p>

Why take part?	Staff had run a similar Takeover Day at the London Wall site the previous year and had found the experience to be very beneficial. As well as an opportunity to use the other Museum of London site and work with a different school, staff wanted to build on the success of the event by adding in elements such as costume and the development of child characters.
Who took part?	Two classes of Year 5&6 pupils from a school the museum had worked with previously. The school were regular visitors and teachers, in particular the Head Teacher, were known to be very positive about partnership opportunities with heritage sites.
What did they do?	The children were in charge of welcoming visitors and interpreting the galleries for the day, acting, singing and dancing in character, telling stories and working as gallery hosts.
How did they spend their time on the day?	<p>The build up to the event started some months before Takeover Day, with the pupils visiting the museum and regular meetings taking place at school. The museum's learning staff helped pupils research relevant time periods, develop their characters and stories and script their performances. The children also learnt about the role of visitor services, including how to welcome visitors, use radios and make announcements.</p> <p>On Takeover Day the children worked in teams, stationed in different areas of the museum to interact with visitors en route round the galleries. Some children also filmed the performances, which were scheduled to take place at regular intervals during the day.</p>
What happened next?	<p>Evaluation of the children's experience showed that it had had a significant impact on their attitude towards museums (see Kids in Museum's Takeover Day 2012 report). After Takeover Day, the children were more positive about museums in general and expressed more enjoyment and ownership when talking about their museum visit. They also reported having more confidence and being proud of their achievements.</p> <p>The positive feeling generated by Takeover Day permeated throughout the school and has strengthened their relationship with the museum. Teachers have a better understanding of the innovative ways in which the museum can be used for teaching and learning.</p> <p><i>'I enjoyed it when a man had a can of drink and Guisy (Visitor Host) told me to tell him that drinks weren't allowed in the galleries and I did it but all the men round us started to laugh but he gave me the drink and said "you're doing a good job mate". That was probably the moment when I felt most important.'</i></p>

CASE STUDY 5

PITT RIVERS MUSEUM AND OXFORD UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Why take part?

The museums had run a Takeover Day in 2011, with younger pupils and with a consultative focus. This year the staff wanted to take this a step further and give more decision-making responsibility to some young people. On discovering that the date coincided with an Oxford-wide evening festival, in which the university museums usually take part, they decided to combine both initiatives.

Who took part?

Eight sixth formers from a local school that the museum had worked with previously. The museum put out a call for participants via a teacher; the students then self-selected so not all were friends or studying the same subjects. One had been part of Takeover Day the year before.

What did they do?

The students were given responsibility for running an element of the evening's programme, designing and delivering activities for visitors.

How did they spend their time on the day?

Four planning meetings were held between the students and museum staff in the lead up to the event. The students worked to their strengths, breaking into smaller teams and doing much of the research and preparation in their own time.

The activities they devised tied into the overall Polar theme of the festival. These included:

- a slideshow of Inuit objects from PRM and pictures of Polar regions
- making a collaborative floor map based on an Inuit map
- handling table of objects and animal specimens
- making stop-motion animations of snow scenes and a display on global warming
- demonstrating non-newtonian fluids with cornflour and a speaker

On the night the students were also handed over control of the Museums' Facebook and Twitter accounts.

What happened next?

The event was well-attended and the museums were impressed with the students' commitment and enthusiasm for delivering their activities. There were slightly more teenagers attending than normal as a result of the students' involvement. One student applied to become a museum volunteer and another came back to do work experience. The initiative was also viewed positively by the school; although it was out of school hours eight teachers came along with their families to visit the event.

Despite initial reservations about holding a Takeover Day event on a day which was already so busy for the museum, staff found it was actually a great way to truly let young people take charge within a supportive environment. Doing something unexpected and not being sure of the outcomes became a really beneficial experience for staff as well as the young people and visitors. The space used to deliver the events was also newly opened and the team learnt a lot from the young people about how to best use it for future events.

'I've always loved this museum. The idea of just going, here's a space, do some stuff. That's really cool.' Teacher

'I thought it would be kind of lip service where you pretend that kids had decision making powers but it wasn't and the kids took it between their teeth. It was a difficult mix – you have to provide a framework and leadership but you don't want to stifle ideas. They were quite clued up and realistic about what they could do. We have to fit it in with our workload, but so do they.'
PRM staff member

CASE STUDY 6

THE GEFFRYE MUSEUM

LONDON

Why take part?

The museum is in the process of redesigning some areas and wanted to ask young visitors for their feedback on aspects of the current museum experience.

Who took part?

30 Key Stage 2 pupils. Working in partnership with Hackney Learning Trust the museum had invited numerous schools across the borough to participate in their Special Educational Needs Forum. Each school could sign up two children from Year 6. The museum wanted to offer the opportunity specifically to SEN pupils as it felt their viewpoint was sometimes overlooked and wanted to be able to hear their individual voices.

What did they do?

The children were invited to trial different aspects of a museum visit. There was then an opportunity to collect their thoughts and ideas for change and present them to museum staff.

How did they spend their time on the day?

After an introduction session which included a look at the visual timetable and a fun game to get the children moving, the rest of the morning was dedicated to workshops:

- Front of House role play – a drama session highlighting questions children might ask staff in a museum.
- Creating a resource for the Quiz desk – the children looked in the Garden Reading Room for inspiration and returned to the Quiz desk area to develop ideas of something new and affordable the staff can use in future.
- Design a Garden – coming up with games and activities they would like to see in a museum garden.
- Audio Guide – the children chose a postcard of a room, went there and listened to the audio guide. They then reviewed it and suggested improvements.

During the afternoon the children separated into two groups to discuss their findings and opinions. They made a short presentation to each other and came up with three things for each of the four aspects that could be improved.

Due to the nature of the children's learning difficulties, the Education Officer felt it was essential to include non-written forms of feedback such as drama and images to record their views.

What happened next?

All the feedback from the children has been processed by the museum and changes are being implemented as a result. By focussing their attention on very specific parts of the museum, the children were able to go into detail with their suggestions and provide viable solutions. Museum staff said the children had highlighted issues and come up with ideas that they would never have thought of. These included basic changes such as better signposting of disabled facilities and also more creative suggestions such as topiary animals for the museum garden. Using more music and embedding sensory aspects in the visitor experience was a key learning point for the staff.

The museum now wants to run all its forums using this child-led format in future.

LIST OF MUSEUMS TAKING PART IN 2012

Abbot Hall Art Gallery
At Bristol
Barnsley Museums:
Cannon Hall Museum
The Cooper Gallery
Worsbrough Mill Museum
Elsecar Heritage Centre
Experience Barnsley Museum
Bradford Museums and Galleries:
Manor House Museum, Ilkley
Bolton Museum
British Museum
Calke Abbey
Chelmsford Museum
Combe Martin Museum
Corinium Museum
DepotArts at Springburn Exhibition Space
Discover
Erasmus
Darwin House
Estorick Collection
Falmouth Art Gallery
Fordingbridge Museum
Fulham Palace
Glasgow Museums
Gloucester Archives
Hampshire Museums & Arts (SEARCH)
Hampshire Museums and Galleries Trust (EDGE Project)
Harris Museum & Art Gallery
Haslemere Educational Museum
Historic Royal Palaces:
Hampton Court and Tower of London
Honeywood Museum
Horniman Museum
Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
IWM London
Jewish Museum
Kew Bridge Steam Museum
Lewes Priory Trust
London Transport Museum
Manchester Museum
Manx Museum
Market Hall Museum
Museum of East Anglian Life
Museum of London Docklands
Museum of Somerset
National Museum of the Royal Navy
National Museums Liverpool
National Portrait Gallery
NCCL Galleries of Justice Museum
Northampton Museum and Art Gallery
North Lincolnshire Council Museums
Novium
Penlee House Gallery and Museum
People's History Museum
Petersfield Museum and The Flora Twort Gallery
Pitt Rivers Museum and Oxford University Museum of Natural History
Poole Museum Service
River & Rowing Museum
Roman Baths at Pixash Lane Store
Royal Air Force Museum Cosford
Royal Museums Greenwich (National Maritime Museum)
Sherborne Museum
Sharpe's Pottery Museum
Sutton House NT
Tate Liverpool
Museums Worcestershire (The Commandery)
The Fusilier Museum
The Geffrye Museum
The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum
The National Centre for Craft & Design and Design Factory
The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
The Wallace Collection
The Wedgwood Museum
Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum
Tide & Time Museum
Tullie House
University of Oxford Botanic Garden
V&A Museum
Wheal Martyn China Clay Mining Museum
Whitby Museum
Whitworth Art Gallery
Wolverhampton Art Gallery
Woodhorn Museum & Archive



www.kidsinmuseums.org.uk

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