

# **Knowledge and Inspiration: the democratic face of culture**

Evidence in Making the Case for Museums, Libraries and Archives  
August 2006

Full report

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The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is the lead strategic agency for museums, libraries and archives. We are part of the wider MLA Partnership, working with the nine regional agencies to improve people's lives by building knowledge, supporting learning, inspiring creativity and celebrating identity.

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## **Contents**

Glossary of abbreviations	2
Introduction	3
1 Knowledge and inspiration	5
2 The new popularity of museums, libraries and archives	7
3 Museums, libraries and archives and Government	10
4 Sustaining citizenship and civil society	14
5 Promoting education and learning	18
6 Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence	23
7 Representing the UK, nations, regions and communities	25
8 Renewal and regeneration	30
9 Physical, mental and social well-being	33
10 Creating public value	35
11 Conclusion	41
Endnotes	44
Bibliography	49

## **Glossary of abbreviations**

An apology to the reader. There is as little jargon as possible in this paper. But the use of acronyms is unavoidable.

AAC	Archives Awareness Campaign
ACE	Arts Council England
ALVA	Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
BMJ	British Medical Journal
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DETR	The former Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Department of Health
FTE	Full-time Employment
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
MLA	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
MLU	Mobile Learning Unit
NCA	National Council on Archives
NHM	The Natural History Museum
NMDC	National Museums Directors' Conference
NMSI	National Museum of Science and Industry
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONS	Office of National Statistics
RCMG	Research Centre for Museums and Galleries
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Introduction

Throughout the country, museums libraries and archives have been at the vanguard of social and economic change. Buildings from Daniel Libeskind's Imperial War Museum of the North to the new Jubilee Library in Brighton are resplendent at the crest of a wave of regeneration. But, as the increased popularity of the sector, and the trust that politicians have placed in it shows, there is much more to these new buildings than cutting edge architecture. Housed in each of these visual successes, there is a wealth of social, economic and political activity that is instrumental in building our futures.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council leads a sector that is at the forefront of democratisation and enfranchisement. The institutions within the sector have reinvented themselves from being passive repositories of the past, becoming deliverers of social and economic value, and playing an empowering role in a more participatory, multi-cultural and engaged society. The innovation that they have shown in enabling this and the imagination that they inspire are essential stimuli to a creative Britain.

This report highlights the evidence for the central importance of museums, libraries and archives to our future. It does so by understanding their role as a **public service, delivering public value**. It looks at what the sector does in terms of values that are intrinsic, instrumental and institutional, and shows what they mean in practice.

The sector contributes to public value in the following areas:

- sustaining citizenship and civil society;
- promoting education and learning;
- stimulating creativity and cultural excellence;
- representing the UK, nations, regions and communities;
- bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK;

- driving renewal and regeneration; and
- contributing to physical, mental and social well-being.

Museums, libraries and archives promote knowledge and inspiration. By providing information in ways that engage, stimulate and encourage, they contribute to the well-being of the individual, the community, society and the nation at the same time. The sector's activities can take effect in all these areas and on all these levels at the same time – this is most coherently and powerfully expressed in terms of public and cultural value.

This document:

- Identifies how museums, libraries and archives have adapted to the changing demands of the public whom they serve, and have asserted themselves as providers of knowledge and inspiration.
- Demonstrates how popular the sector is with its public and tourists.
- Shows how it is trusted by politicians to deliver on social and economic agenda, and has been successful.
- Proposes that the value that the sector contributes can be developed and reconsidered in terms of public and cultural value.
- Shows how museums, libraries and archives deliver public and cultural value.

## 1 Knowledge and inspiration

*“Our success as Great Britain . . .  
depends upon us rediscovering from our history  
the shared values that bind us together.”*

**Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, 7 July 2004**

The story of one institution stands as testimony to the success of the museums, libraries and archives sector across the country. Since December 2001, when free entry reopened the doors of our nationally funded museums to all, attendances at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) have increased by 157%. The visitors who now throng its entrance pass beneath two sculptured figures: those of Knowledge and Inspiration. Since its foundation, the purpose of the V&A has been clear. The collections that it holds – as a museum of fine and applied arts, as the National Art Library, and as an archive of design – are far more than simply displays or holdings. Like the collections of the 2,500 museums, 4,620 libraries and 2,179 archives that are the remit of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), they are a depository of knowledge and a source of inspiration.<sup>†</sup>

Nationwide, museums, libraries and archives house the evidence of all that we have been and all that we have felt. Without them, we would have a severely impoverished picture of our communal and individual identities. On their shelves, in their cases, and in their vaults are preserved the products and ideas of art, history, science, technology, natural history, and every other sphere of our lives. In the ways that they present and use this material, these institutions create and reinforce values and symbols that are part of our present, and which have the capacity to shape our futures. They show us where we have been and where we are going. Because of the knowledge they hold and the inspiration that they offer, museums, libraries and archives are essential to our social and economic survival.

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<sup>†</sup> To clarify, this report will refer equally to museums, libraries and archives and the ‘sector’. This is to be understood as referring to organisations within the MLA’s remit, and to the MLA itself. While national museums such as the V&A are separately represented by the National Museum Directors’ Conference, they are included within this report.

### **Creating knowledge**

As well as being expressions of the values that guide our lives, these institutions are fundamental to the way that we manage our daily existence. Archives are central to the running of our society: without legal records, there could be no viable concept of precedent, and therefore little foundation for the Law as we know it. Libraries are an active resource, for teenagers doing homework, for adults looking to improve their skills, and for pensioners seeking new interests. Museums gather new knowledge, as well as store the knowledge of the past: the objects they collect have the capacity to offer fresh interpretations of the world. Archives, libraries and museums enter into conversation with the visitors who come through their doors, engaging with people within and beyond their institutional walls. When we visit a museum, a library, or an archive we leave it with new knowledge and new potential.

### **Creating inspiration**

Just as we vary as individuals, the form of the knowledge and the nature of the potential that is derived from a visit to the museum, the library or the archive will be different for each person. Increasingly, visitors bring with them experiences and expectations and are able to approach museums, libraries, and archives more confidently and creatively. Rather than being closed cells of knowledge, the objects and information contained in our cultural institutions are part of our social capital, the fabric of our emerging identities. The relationship between the public and its past is changing: museums, libraries and archives encourage their visitors to respond to what they find, and relate it back to themselves. They draw from our common past and cultural heritage to create a diverse and grounded future.

The benefits that museums, libraries and archives provide are varied and span many areas, but are rarely articulated either as a whole, or in the specific terms that capture their true value. This document will do this, showing how they inter-relate. Their ultimate purpose is to create public value by giving users the means to articulate and navigate the society that they make up. They are precisely the means

by which we can rediscover from our history the shared values that bind us together. With the right investment, we can use them to ensure our future. Museums, libraries and archives are the natural resources of a creative age.

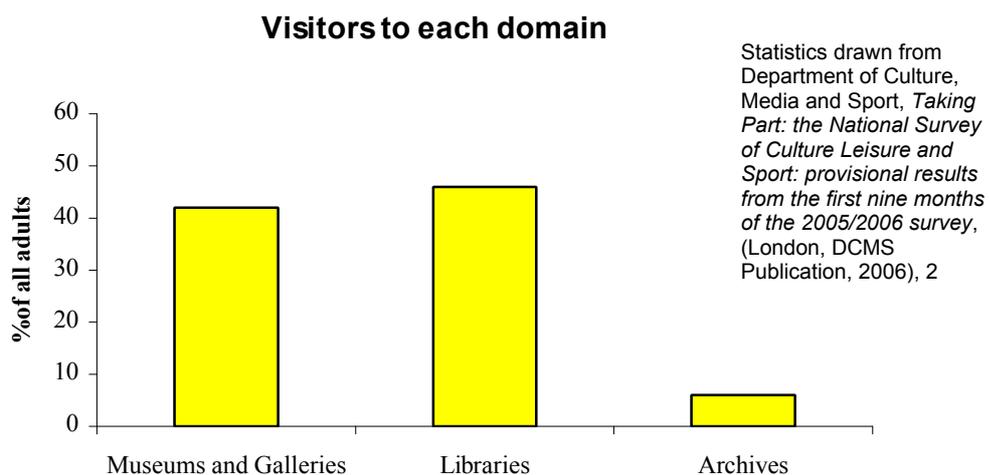
## **2 The new popularity of museums, libraries and archives**

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums, libraries and archives have created for themselves a new role in society. Through this, they have found a new popularity with the public. Attendance figures tell the story. The July 2006 figures from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's *Taking Part* survey shows that 48% of the population had used a library, 42% visited a museum or gallery, and 6% consulted an archive in the previous 12 months.<sup>1</sup> Museums, in particular, are the area in which the sector has delivered significant success – according to VisitBritain's 2004 statistics on visitor attractions in England, alongside country parks, they are the category that saw the greatest increase in visitor numbers since 2003.<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, they are also the area in which many different natures and effects of visitorship have most comprehensively been addressed. Between 1999/00 and 2002/3, London's museums, alone, saw a 32% rise in attendance, comprising some 7.6m extra visits.<sup>3</sup> Such success is reflected nationwide: in Wales, The Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagans has seen a 115% rise in visitor numbers, and has become the most popular tourist attraction in Wales.<sup>4</sup> On the national scale, English museums and galleries are drawing 15% more visitors than they did 15 years ago.

Such encouraging figures are constant throughout the sector. In the government's Public Library Service Standards survey, 94% of users over 16 judged the service either 'good' or 'very good'.<sup>5</sup> Archivists, for their part, can report that 79% of readers describe their experience as being 'useful and enjoyable', with 63% using the archive for personal or leisure reasons.<sup>6</sup>

In 2005, in his first week in office, the Minister for Culture, David Lammy, was able to announce a greatly increased number of visits to the UK's libraries, totalling some 337m in 2003-4, up 14m from 2002-3, itself a dramatic leap from the 5m increase of

2001-2.<sup>7</sup> In early 2006, figures released by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy showed that visitorship to libraries had risen still further in 2004-5.<sup>8</sup> Part of this increase is down to the increased adaptation of the library domain to IT and other technologies. Comparison with the world outside the library walls is revealing. Between 2003 and 2004, the value of printed reference and informational material to the UK economy increased by some 6.4%; at the same time, the value of comparable digital material increased by an impressive 17.9%.<sup>9</sup> As people have come more and more to take to the computer, rather than turn the pages of a book, in their search for basic information such as company literature, telephone enquiries and so forth, libraries have been on hand to provide them with the means to do this in affordable and more varied ways. The 30,000 PCs currently installed in libraries, with an average of seven per branch, are testimony to the domain's progress in this field.<sup>10</sup> Visiting a library is second only to film-going in the list of arts activities undertaken.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the specialist field of archives has seen reader numbers increase from around 690,000 in 1997/8, to some 855,000 in 2002/3.<sup>12</sup> In the regions, in 1996, 436,583 readers used local authority archives; by 2003-4, this had risen to 759,640.



Given that the tourism industry in the UK is one of the largest, accounting for 3.4% of the economy, and worth some £74.2bn in 2003, the significance of the contribution

made by museums and galleries cannot be overestimated.<sup>13</sup> According to VisitBritain, six out of the ten most visited attractions in the UK are museums and galleries:<sup>14</sup> four out of the top five listed attractions are museums, and a further five regional museums are in the top twenty.

On top of their success in attracting tourists, museums, libraries and archives also satisfy domestic needs. This public appreciation can be directly measured in monetary terms. In a flagship study into the value placed on a local service, users of Bolton's museums, libraries and archives were willing to pay more to use each of the three than it currently costs to run them.<sup>15</sup> Non-users, it was discovered, are willing to contribute to their upkeep. The value placed on the sector as a whole was calculated by combining the amount that both users and non-users of museums, libraries and archives were willing to pay for the opportunity to use them: they were willing to pay 160% of the actual costs.<sup>16</sup> In a similar study into the economic value placed on the British Library, it was found that even those who do not use it are willing to pay in tax, on average, more than twice the amount that it currently receives in public investment.<sup>17</sup>

Between 2001 and 2003, the number agreeing that the arts and culture 'should receive public funding' rose 5% to 79%.<sup>18</sup> As a result, people are more stringent in their demands to know exactly what value is being returned for their taxes.<sup>19</sup> Questions like this reveal a public aware of both the value that museums, libraries, and archives can add, and of the social capital that they hold for them. "Do museums deserve more public money?" asked the BBC in March 2004. The answers were almost unanimous in saying "yes".<sup>20</sup>

### 3 Museums, libraries and archives and Government

*“When we undertake policies in Government,  
the first thing we do is look at the evidence.”*

***Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture***<sup>21</sup>

By word and deed, the government has shown that it understands the value that the sector adds, and thus the need to continue investment. The Prime Minister has spoken of the “advances that decide the character and culture of a nation”, as being attributable in part to free museum entry.<sup>22</sup> Six months after free entry to our national museums was introduced in December 2001, a 62% increase in visitor numbers demonstrated the appeal that the sector has: that figure has now risen to 75%.<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, the Victoria and Albert Museum, alone, recorded a 157% increase in attendance after dropping its charges.<sup>24</sup> Nationally, where independent museums and some local authority museums are obliged to charge, the museums and galleries domain has preserved one of the lowest increases in admissions charges among all visitor attractions. Whereas, in VisitBritain’s statistics, country parks have equalled the museum domain’s numerical success in attracting visitors, they have also increased their charges by a significant 11% compared to the modest 4% on the part of museums and galleries.<sup>25</sup>

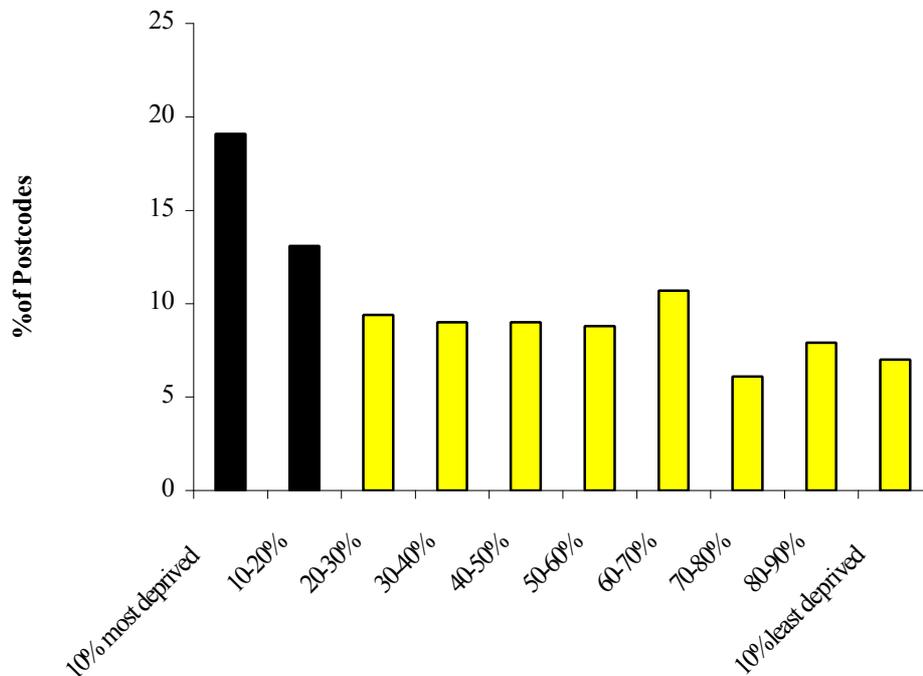
Such advances are common across the sector and reflect the renewed approach that it is taking. Up and down the country, schemes such as *Renaissance in the Regions*, the *People’s Network* and the *Archives Awareness Campaign* (which raised awareness, encouraged new users, and challenged the stereotypical view of archives) have reinvigorated the sector’s respective domains.<sup>26</sup> In a survey of the success of *Renaissance in the Regions*, the mean number of visits to museums nationwide had increased from 5 to 6.4 between 2003 and 2005.<sup>27</sup> Museums, libraries and archives, according to a recent survey, top the list of the sources of information that we most trust, exceeding television, radio, broadsheet newspapers and the Internet.<sup>28</sup> Part of the sector’s success is down to the people who work in it. In the libraries domain in particular, professionals are trusted and looked to as

intermediaries, encouraging and assisting in people's reading experiences.<sup>29</sup> It is the professionals within the sector who are crucial in implementing and delivering governmental objectives.

There is outreach too. The sector has extended the opportunities that it can offer to a greater and more diverse audience. Targeted surveys show that some 11% of the new users of Liverpool's library services were from ethnic minorities; in Nottingham, 30% of users are unemployed, and in Walsall, 36%.<sup>30</sup> Ethnic groups surveyed in Bolton, meanwhile, believe that archives have a tremendous role to play in reflecting the changing face of Bolton's cultures.<sup>31</sup>

The education provided by the sector is comparably wide-reaching. In 2004, just over a quarter of schools' visits to museums were made by schools in wards classified by government as being those in which children are at risk of exclusion.<sup>32</sup> About 19.1% of visits to museums in the first and second phases of Renaissance in the Regions hubs were made by schools in wards that ranked in the most deprived post-code areas, with the total rising to 32.2% when the next 10% are included – nearly a third of school visits are made by those from the most deprived areas of the country.<sup>33</sup> As well as representing a significant achievement in outreach, such initiative is crucial to building a solid foundation for the future.

**Percentages of class visits ranked according to the most deprived postal areas, 2005**



The government recognises the social and economic benefits that the sector delivers. Museums, libraries and archives are valuable in attracting industry and creating further employment. They attract and engender a stimulated and creative public, and this has been a focus of recent policy. Funding for the sector is investment in the nation’s future, and policy makers have been quick to recognise this. Spending on the national institutions, for instance, reveals a concentration of resources on the sector. In the 2004 Spending review, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced an annual average increase in funding of 2.3% in real terms to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport over the three years to 2007-08, £230m up on the previous allocation. In 2005/06, our national museums, our regional museums and the MLA were allocated a total of £342m; by 2007/08, this will have increased to £401m, an increment of almost 20%. The Government is thus looking to both the arts, and museums, galleries and libraries as core deliverers of economic

and social value. Their continued effect is considered essential: here, they have been very successful, and as we shall see, the sector has replicated this success in its contribution to health, and regeneration and renewal. For this success to be sustained, such investment must be continued.

But why is the museums, libraries and archives sector trusted with so important a mission? The reason is that the sector has recognised that it has an economic and social role to play, but that there are also expectations that it has to meet that stretch beyond this and into the delivery of public value. In other areas of public cultural provision, these expectations have been defined as the duty to:

- sustain citizenship and civil society;
- promote education and learning;
- stimulate creativity and cultural excellence;
- represent the UK, nations, regions and communities; and
- bring the UK to the world and the world to the UK.<sup>34</sup>

For Gordon Brown, it is the success of our museums and galleries and the cultures they represent in meeting *these* aims – more than in the blunt economic statistics upon which many have built the case for them – that is the essence of their purpose. In his words, they promote “an ability to adapt, and an openness to new ideas and new influences which have made us, as a country, both creative and internationalist in our outlook”.<sup>35</sup> If we look at the sector as a whole as a public service, as defined in the above terms, it is clear just how important a role they play.

## 4 Sustaining citizenship and civil society

*“Cultural institutions are among the many  
‘immune systems’ of a society’s self-reflection.”*

***Olafür Eliasson, creator of  
The Weather Project, Tate Modern***<sup>36</sup>

In a world in which the politics of identity – as defined by our preferences, habits and behaviours – are taking centre stage, we need spaces and places in which people can connect to different ideas and concepts.<sup>37</sup> Museums, libraries and archives are ever more entrepreneurial in providing this. Practically, they are more accessible than ever before: mobile libraries and the use of museum collections in communities and outside the institution itself have, for instance, successfully extended the reach of organisations to more diverse audiences.

The sector also facilitates political engagement, enabling the expression of new forms of identity through new channels and platforms. In libraries up and down the country, the *People’s Network* has been one of the principal organs of digital citizenship.<sup>38</sup> In 2004, it helped 62,400 people gain a new skill. Elsewhere, at the National Museum of Science and Industry, young people can visit the new Wellcome wing and use dazzling new technologies to ask that most basic and oldest of questions “Who am I?”<sup>39</sup>

Visitors to museums, libraries, and archives – the public – cannot be seen as a single mass. They bring with them multiple and diverse opinions, and have within them the potential to make as many contributions. As the range of options competing for people’s attention has diversified, so the range of subjects that interest them has become equally, if not more varied.<sup>40</sup> This is the ‘inclusive Britishness’ that Chancellor Gordon Brown has identified, a Britishness united around national symbols that unite the country.<sup>41</sup> Our museums, libraries and archives house many of these symbols: James Watts’ experimental notes for the steam engine are held at Birmingham’s City Archives, and institutions, like the Beamish Museum in the North

East, represent our origins and the way we lived in the past.<sup>42</sup> Others, like Brighton's new Jubilee Library or its famous Pavilion, cared for by Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, *are* in themselves such symbols of Britishness and in the confidence and enterprise that they represent, celebrate our past and herald our future.

Where, formerly, museums, libraries and archives might have been expected to cover a range of familiar subject areas, now they cater to the many different interests of many different visitors. From the Gulbenkian Prize-winning Big Pit, through to proposals for London's Academy of Sex and Relationships,<sup>43</sup> Boscastle's Museum of Witchcraft, and partnerships with the UK Film Council and the Regional Film Archives, the sector is covering more and more subjects. As this latter partnership implies, museums, libraries and archives also connect with other institutions to offer more opportunity. In the North East, where The Sage Gateshead gives people the chance to gain broader experiences of music, from Stravinsky to steel pans, Gateshead library services have developed a branch within The Sage itself, providing the means to investigate just a few steps away from the prompt to discover.<sup>44</sup>

Museums, libraries and archives have opened themselves to less institutional partnerships too. People today are more confident and creative in sourcing knowledge and information. As communities and people resist conventional classifications, combining in their identity multiple interests, attitudes, experiences, and origins, they are becoming more assertive in controlling its meaning.<sup>45</sup> They are also more alert to the value of culture as a medium of expression, and there is a growing will to put in, as well as take out. The sector has proved itself admirably up to date in meeting this – where, but in museums, libraries and archives, can we access information in such vibrant and original forms?

Moving from the prescriptive targeting of separate groups, to the more flexible and open presentation of collections, the sector has adapted to enfranchise a more democratic sense of ownership. In the domain of archives, Commanet is an example

of how the sector is growing to consider communities as *producers* of collections, rather than simply consumers.<sup>46</sup> A charity for community archives founded in 2000 and partnered by the National Archives, it uses a basic piece of software, Comma, to enable communities to store and catalogue their archives online.<sup>47</sup> There are three core principles that underlie this:

- the community creates its own archive;
- the community has editorial control over its archive; and
- the community owns the copyright in its archive.

Through such community action, the sector accesses rich seams of material and information that could easily pass by. Such activity extends personalisation to the community, and enables us to connect knowledge and facts to the self. Using Commanet, archivists in Belfast have used the photograph of an under-13s football team to teach children a history of Northern Ireland and its troubles that could barely be accessed by the history books. In this, and examples like it, the sector functions to give distant stories direct and personal resonance. This resonance with identity is continued through actions of the sector too. Built on the site of the Rover car company's design and technology testing ground at Gaydon, the Heritage Motor Centre's history is intimately connected with the car industry of the West Midlands and the troubles it has seen. It provides lasting testimony to a period of which many in the region were a part. After the closure of the Longbridge plant in April 2005, it was fitting that the centre was able to acquire the last car to roll off the production line, just as it had the first that the plant had produced.<sup>48</sup>

Museums, libraries, and archives use new forms of engagement and participation to allow politicisation. They create powerful and meaningful messages because they work in relation to the visitor: 45% of museum visitors agree that they felt more positive towards other people and their cultures and ideas as a result of their visit.<sup>49</sup> Teachers consider this a vital attribute: 81% of those asked thought it either 'likely' or 'very likely' that their pupils had learned more about other people and communities as a result of their visit to museums of the Renaissance in the regions Hubs.<sup>50</sup> The

public can also teach the professionals: one participant in the *There be Monsters* project at the National Archives, returned to take part in a staff seminar outlining his experiences as a user with mental health problems.<sup>51</sup>

Museums, libraries and archives enable such reflection across time, as well as geography, and give us the opportunity to think of contemporary issues afresh. The Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, for example, has been one of the most successful projects of recent years, not only in attendance, but also in method, finding points of consonance between viewer and victim. As perhaps the most drastic instance, this is also the clearest example of how the sector can help connect subject-matter to the individual, creating of personal reaction more generally, and social capital.

## 5 Promoting education and learning

*“Education is one of the keys to social mobility,  
and so we must make sure that a good education  
is available to every child in every community.”*

***Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education***<sup>52</sup>

The value of museums, libraries and archives is determined by the publics that use them. “I received the fundamentals of my education in school,” said the writer Isaac Asimov, “but that was not enough. My real education, the superstructure, the details, the true architecture, I got out of the public library”.<sup>53</sup> By providing inspiration and knowledge, the sector is crucial in promoting education and learning. What makes museums, libraries and archives so valuable is that they do so in innovative and enlivening ways.

Statistically, the sector’s promotion of learning is impressive. Of just over 17,000 younger pupils (at KS 2) surveyed in 2005, 93% agreed that they had enjoyed their visit to the museum, and 90% agreed that they had learned something new.<sup>54</sup> The sector contributes significantly to adult learning too: approximately 54% of learners visiting Cambridgeshire’s libraries in 2003-4 were aged 55 and above.<sup>55</sup> In archives, the Archives Awareness Campaign has used new technology to open the knowledge housed by the domain to a far greater number than ever before: 40% of participants were visiting an archive for the first time.<sup>56</sup>

Both the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and the Department for Education and Skills have set key outcomes desired for children, and the sector is central to achieving these. These are identified as:

<b>Learning outcomes for children<sup>57</sup></b>
<p><b>Knowledge and understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased learning within a subject areas</li> <li>• increased understanding of connections between subjects</li> <li>• increased learning across subjects</li> <li>• increased cultural understanding</li> </ul> <p><b>Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased ability to work with others</li> <li>• ability to make informed choices beyond and within planned experiences</li> </ul> <p><b>Attitudes and values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase in self-confidence and self-esteem for children</li> <li>• increased cultural understanding and respect and tolerance for others</li> </ul> <p><b>Enjoyment, inspiration, creativity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fulfilment and satisfaction from achievement for children</li> </ul> <p><b>Activity, behaviour, progression</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased involvement in class, school or community events</li> </ul>
<b>Learning outcomes for teachers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attitudes and values</li> <li>• positive attitudes to experience and desire for further experiences</li> <li>• increase in confidence, expertise and personal satisfaction of teachers</li> <li>• increase in satisfaction of schools with museum education programmes (e.g. as seen through educational achievement of children)</li> </ul>
<b>Educational outputs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase in the total numbers of children and young people who participate in educational programmes in the regions</li> <li>• increase in participation of schools (teachers and students) in development of museum programmes</li> <li>• new partnership development with schools</li> <li>• increase in volume of on or off-site education by museum education staff</li> <li>• increase in object-based teaching at museums or schools</li> </ul>

Similar outcomes are achieved across the sector. Libraries have responded to the child-centred aims of *Every Child Matters*, making learning relevant to children's lives.<sup>58</sup> In Slough, library professionals working on the *Summer Reading Challenge* set themselves a 43% completion rate; across four libraries and one mobile library unit in summer 2004, 56.2% of participating children completed the challenge, reading six books.<sup>59</sup> Gloucestershire Records Office used its collections to develop and produced a CD-Rom, funded through the Department for Education and Skills

Museum and Galleries Education Programme to support children's learning of local history.<sup>60</sup> By using technology in this way, the service – like others around the country – was able to extend its collections to our youngest generations in a format that is both practical and has appeal.

Innovative approaches like this are the basis of the success that the sector has achieved. The sector provides admirably for adults' and children's learning alike. In order for information to become knowledge, it must be absorbed and synthesised, and so the medium in which it is delivered must be inspirational and have relevance to the people to whom it speaks. Museums, libraries and archives have risen to the challenge to sustain and develop the relevance of their core value – the provision of knowledge – in a world in which information can be accessed anywhere and at all times, and in ways that are increasingly confused with entertainment. Furthermore, in a more competitive environment, with “difficult market conditions ... exacerbated by the growth of retail destinations, some of which included heritage elements,” museums, libraries and archives have grown and adapted to take into account competition beyond the sector.<sup>61</sup> Amid such a clamour of calls for attention, they have not only maintained their attendance, but have also diversified and extended it, combining creativity with effect. The knowledge that museums, libraries and archives contain has always been recognised – their success has been in the way that they have championed and applied it.

As visitors have changed, the sector has changed accordingly, and increases in attendance reflect its more sophisticated appeal and modernity. The professionals in museums, libraries and archives have devised and organised projects that are ever more connective and far-reaching, bringing knowledge home in more applicable and seamless ways. Birmingham Museum and Gallery, amongst others, have introduced evening singles events, themed around exhibitions ranging from Bollywood to the 1960s: these attract younger audiences who bring with them a totally different way of responding to what the museum has to offer, using the collections and the interest that they excite in new lights and contexts.<sup>62</sup> While commuters descend into the

tunnels of London Bridge Underground station, they pass displays by the Museum of London showing some of the mosaics and artefacts unearthed from the city's past. Once on the Tube, we can read a column in the Metro free newspaper, sponsored by the Archives Awareness Campaign, which tells us what happened on this day in history. In Oxfordshire, the museums service has used Heritage Lottery funding to support a 'culture bus' that extends collections to those unable conveniently to visit museum sites.<sup>63</sup> Partnerships like that between Gateshead libraries and The Sage or between archives and the BBC's *Who do you think you are?* are frequent and institutions are acutely aware of the wider applicability of cultural experience.

Accessibility is physical as well. The problems faced by one elderly library user – "it's difficult to catch a bus into town. The books are so heavy I can only manage two at a time. I come here about three times a week. If I had to do a trip into town, I'd only get two books a week" – could speak for many.<sup>64</sup> For the elderly and physically impaired, local libraries and housebound services are therefore particularly significant: the mobile library units in rural Lincolnshire, for instance, have been effective in opening the *People's Network* to the audiences who most need it, and Oxfordshire's 'culture bus' has extended the opportunities provided by the region's museums to a far wider proportion of the population.<sup>65</sup> Libraries also work with prisons, with each HM Prison offering a service provided by the local library service. In Nottingham, this has been further developed as 'The Big Book Share', in which librarians work with prisoners to help them to teach their visiting children to read a scheme that develops not only learning, but also provides a means of familial cohesion in the most difficult of circumstances.<sup>66</sup>

For many, and especially those who feel marginalised within society, museums, libraries and archives can also be safe places in which users feel neither threatened in their person, nor constrained in their thoughts and exploration. To support this, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals has issued guidelines to help library staff in making institutions 'A Safe Place for Children'. It outlines such issues as the legal background, how to cope with unsupervised children, and other

issues related to the duty of care owed to young people using libraries.<sup>67</sup> This attitude is reflected in the design of institutions. The library in March, Cambridgeshire has been redesigned to feel welcoming and safe, and works to the commitment that “whatever you want to learn and however you want to learn, whether at home or in a group, we can make it happen for you”.<sup>68</sup> This extends to functional security besides. Borrowing – as opposed to buying – a book encourages greater experimentation and risk-taking in reading; it costs less to make a mistake, and so encourages adventure in choosing new titles, subjects, and authors.<sup>69</sup>

As the *People’s Network* demonstrates, the sector has been quick to grasp the many opportunities that technology affords. We are as likely to come across cutting edge interactivity in the museum as we are in a games arcade or console shop. The British Museum’s *Mummy: the Inside Story*, for example, echoed the innovation of Commanet in the archives domain, and the Science Museum’s Wellcome wing: it used virtual technology and a neurological scanner to create 1,500 cross-sectional images running the full length of the mummy.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, touch-screen technology allows young and old alike to quiz themselves on what they have learned, and the British Library is working with Microsoft to digitise 100,000 out of copyright books and make them available online by 2006.<sup>71</sup> At The Deep, in Hull, visitors to the *Twilight Zone* can trace evolution through graphic panels and then come face-to-face with an Octopus, bringing forcefully home the museum’s message of conservation.<sup>72</sup> In these, and examples like them, the sector has been able to use the kind of technology normally expected of complex science, or entertainment. The difference is that, rather than fabricating new desires, museums, libraries and archives use such innovation to meet needs that we have had for centuries: learning, exploring and enjoying. Innovation does not require technology either. In Liverpool, the city’s heritage in the cotton industry is told powerfully and creatively in the Merseyside Maritime Museum’s *100% Cotton* exhibit, which contrasts videos of cotton production in Africa with hi-tech equivalents from the US, and encompasses issues as diverse as GM crop production with Vivienne Westwood’s couture.<sup>73</sup> All of these developments, and more besides, are

characteristic of the urbanity and adaptability that puts the sector at the centre of the creative economy.

## 6 Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence

*“People call me crazy, but if you go to the Natural History Museum,  
then you can see the template for what this song is about.  
There’s this creature that looks like an Afghan Hound which is  
meant to be the missing link between dolphins and monkeys.  
It’s got paw-like flippers, waterproof fur like an otter, eyes  
like a fish and no ears. That’s why the dolphin’s warm-blooded.  
Because it must once have lived on land.”*

**Rock-star Ian Brown explaining his lyrics  
from *Dolphins were Monkeys*<sup>74</sup>**

The ability to link diverse ideas and experiences is becoming central to our jobs and lives. As the *Cox Review of Creativity*, published by HM Treasury in December 2005, outlined, these creative capacities are also increasingly essential.<sup>75</sup>

In the past, museums, libraries and archives have been seen as suppliers, away from the action of creativity and occupying the supporting role of attracting workers to the creative industries.<sup>76</sup> In truth, they are crucial in *inspiring* creativity. Forty-four per cent of museum visitors say that they feel motivated to do something related to what they have seen – it is this stimulation that is the essence of the sector’s provision and, 63% agree strongly that their visit was inspirational.<sup>77</sup> A study conducted on behalf of Tyne and Wear and Bristol museums found that 81.4% of participants in museums projects asked felt inspired to creativity.<sup>78</sup> Libraries, too, open readers both young and old to the opportunities of connecting knowledge, moving from book to book or website to website, jumping from one idea to another.<sup>79</sup> The libraries initiative of *The Summer Reading Challenge*, both *in situ*, and online not only enables young readers to read autonomously and creatively, but also generates 35,000 new

library members each year.<sup>80</sup> In 2004, Birmingham Library Services found that the number of book loans on children's tickets had increased by 14% from 2003.<sup>81</sup>

One of the government's key targets is to "make Britain the world's creative hub". To this effect, a new post, the Minister for Creative Industries, has been created to sit inside the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with the remit to work alongside the Minister for Culture.<sup>82</sup> Culture and creativity thus go hand in hand: in a speech in 2005, the Minister for Culture linked the arts firmly to the creative agenda, declaring that they have a huge contribution to make in the future of our country.<sup>83</sup>

Central to this is experience that is active, not passive. This is just what museums, libraries and archives provide. From the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, *The Big Read* and *The Big Draw* have engaged children and others in creative practise.<sup>84</sup> The knowledge that museums, libraries and archives provide fuels creativity. It is from the experiences that the sector offers that we are able to innovate. It is through our experiences in the museum, the library or the archive that we can locate ourselves more confidently in the world around us. Alongside reading, writing and arithmetic, we – and our children – have the tremendous benefit of a fourth essential – the arts and creativity – and it is in museums, libraries and archives that we can access it.

## 7 Representing the UK, nations, regions and communities

*“What the nation ‘means’ is an ongoing project, under constant reconstruction. We come to know its meaning partly through the objects and artefacts which have been made to stand for and symbolise its essential values. Its meaning is constructed within, not above or outside representation.”*

**Professor Stuart Hall**<sup>85</sup>

In 1997, at the start of the current government’s tenure, the political scientist Mark Leonard wrote that “to understand what Britishness means today – and what it could mean in the future – we need to understand how we got here and how Britain developed that traditional identity which remains so strong around the world”.<sup>86</sup> The museums, libraries and archives sector was clearly listening. Today, we can reflect on a decade in which they have become the organs of Britishness. Through their efforts, they are central to rearticulating Britishness to mean all that is, as well as all that was – in one illustration of this, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery invited different community groups to contribute their histories to the displays, the local Gujarati community creating a shrine for the World Art Gallery, and the Gay and Lesbian community contributing to the British History Galleries.<sup>87</sup>

Museums, libraries and archives contribute to civic self-confidence. In purely representational terms, new developments can capture the public imagination: at Bournemouth’s new Central Library, for instance, local teenagers helped to design part of the building, a space in which they regularly gather.<sup>88</sup> Elsewhere, at Falmouth, the National Maritime Museum Cornwall has been adopted as harbouring the past of the townspeople from poets to pirates, and the Cornish to cannibals.<sup>89</sup> This representation is visual too: the museum’s conning tower design has become almost a figurehead for the town itself.

As the cannibals and poets of Falmouth show, the sector is absolutely indispensable in preserving our heritage and past. For instance, save for institutions like Big Pit, our mining heritage, so integral to our history, would be a dwindling memory. Such

preservation can take on global agenda as well: in a world in which a language disappears roughly every fortnight, the work of libraries such as that of the School of Oriental and African Studies is essential.<sup>90</sup> Often, the records of languages preserved in such institutions might well be the only means we have of accessing the cultures that these languages embody, just as Big Pit preserves our mining past. The sector has impact in more everyday terms as well. Where museums, libraries and archives can preserve heritages and languages, they can also maintain writs and documents: it is in the archive that we find the plans that document the towns and cities of today, and it is to them that we turn to discover exactly what we own.

Museums, libraries, and archives can also house information that we did not know that we needed, or that we did not know that we had. As anybody who has had cause to source the deeds of their house or replace their lost birth certificate will tell you, such information must always be kept because it might prove vital. In the US, the Weather Service makes a fortune from archiving old weather reports: lawyers, for one, will always need to know whether it was raining on a given night, and so forth.<sup>91</sup> The records of our personal pasts – and our births, deaths and marriages – are protected and cared for by the archives of our towns and cities. In more general terms, new discoveries among such collections are frequent. In July 2005, for instance, a research student chanced upon an inventory in the National Record Office that listed the full possessions of Robert Walpole. As well as providing unique insight into our political past, the find also provided provenance to paintings by artists including, amongst others, van Dyck, Titian, Rubens and Michelangelo.<sup>92</sup>

Museums, libraries and archives also absorb and nurture information as well as keeping and preserving it. The sector encourages visitors to bring their own experiences, enabling them to contribute to the meaning of the institutions themselves, and so help bring the UK to the world and the world to the UK. Through international loans, exchanges and partnerships, the sector plays a diplomatic role.

The British Museum, for example, has worked with the BBC to organise *Africa Now*, a celebration of African life.<sup>93</sup> As part of this ground-breaking programme, The

British Museum has worked with UNESCO to organise a tour of *The Throne of Weapons* to museums across the country.<sup>94</sup> The Throne was made by a Mozambiquean sculptor, and is constructed of AK-47 rifles, decommissioned from the civil war. As it has toured the UK, being shown at sites as far apart as Ulster Museum in Belfast, and Coventry's The Herbert Museum and Art Gallery, it has provided the centrepiece for talks and seminars around Mozambique's troubles, its past, and its heritage. At the same time, the strife that it represents has been used to parallel and discuss gun crime on Britain's streets. The museums and other sites housing The Throne have acted as centres of connection and inspiration. Museum professionals have used it to introduce people to new cultures and histories, demonstrating cultural production and creativity as a means of discussing and dealing with ideas such as civil war. In so doing, they extend creativity from the work itself, to the interpretations made by individual visitors to museums.

The sector also educates us about our own culture. At the Museum of London, *London's Voices*, run from 2001-2004, presented an oral history of diversity. It brought together a chorus of multiple individual attitudes and backgrounds.<sup>95</sup> Building on oral recordings made by the museum from the 1980s onwards, it provides permanent testimony to the real life of a Londoner in the late 20th century and beyond. Londoners comprise multiple ethnicities, attitudes, backgrounds, and histories: so, to collate these voices, the project was run throughout the capital, meeting and collecting the opinions of diverse people and characters. In a comparable project, Birmingham Archives have produced a book of Black History Sources, collating and introducing the information that they hold on, and produced by, the city's Black community, and in particular the Vanley Burke archive, a collection of the many photographs produced by the photographer that chronicle and symbolise the history of Black Birmingham.<sup>96</sup> Libraries in Northamptonshire, similarly, have worked on the Black History project, an award-winning record of the history of Black people in England from Peter the Saracen, crossbow-maker to King John, on.<sup>97</sup>

It is through such intensified participation and representation that the sector reflects the democratic society within which it exists.<sup>98</sup> The increased value attached to cultural experience has led to more systematic and determined cultural participation. For many, leisure is not a passive consumer activity, but is active and participatory. One effect of this is to bring into question the previously clear distinction between professional and amateur.

Museums, libraries and archives have worked to encourage the participation of these 'pro-ams', enabling them to engage with culture, science, natural history and many other subject areas on their own terms.<sup>99</sup> The sector has led the way in what the lawyer and social critic, Lawrence Lessig, has termed the 'professionalising of creativity', urging professionals to take better advantage of amateur participation.<sup>100</sup> At North Lincolnshire Museum, for instance, the staff of the natural science department has established a working group tapping the expertise of local enthusiasts.<sup>101</sup> Using similar initiative in a digital fashion, the Rural Museum Network collates knowledge on what information about our rural heritage is stored in our museums, and identifies significant gaps – any mystery objects it finds, it posts openly on its website for identification.<sup>102</sup>

Most familiarly, archives have responded to a vastly increased interest in family history by using the Internet to enable engagement in activities that were previously the preserve of the professional. In 2002/2003 some 85 million requests were handled by the National Archives website and, following on from the online partnership with the BBC's *Who do you think you are?* in 2004, 7% of UK adults claim to have started researching their family history for the first time.<sup>103</sup> In a comparable success story, 61% of those using the BBC's Family History website, run in partnership with the National Council on Archives' Awareness Campaign, had never before used the Internet for that purpose.<sup>104</sup> Most strikingly of all, over 89% of visitors to archives in England believe that the domain contributes to society by strengthening family and community identity.<sup>105</sup>

This policy of pro-am participation has value in relation to both practice and policy. As the informational demands placed on the sector broaden, professionals have found new ways in which to advance knowledge through tapping the expertise of amateurs. In association with English Nature, the Natural History Museum has combined the rich amateur heritage of both museum collections and natural history to develop a series of schemes that have championed amateur partnerships.<sup>106</sup> In but two examples, the Natural History Museum has supported the UK's fly fishing community to train its members in identifying and monitoring river flies and, similarly, has worked with ramblers on a project to map the UK's Elm declining population.<sup>107</sup> In so doing, the museum has extended its reach far beyond its South Kensington walls, connecting more diverse and participatory knowledge. Tyne and Wear Museums, similarly, teamed volunteers from all walks of life with professionals to record for posterity a Roman bridge at Corbridge. So successful was the project, and so engaged were the participants that some now act as site guides and have continued their work as cataloguers beyond the initial stages, developing information materials to spread their learning wider.<sup>108</sup>

## 8 Renewal and regeneration

*“Arts buildings lift the spirits, create symbols that people identify with and give identity to places that may not have one. Where the arts start, jobs follow. Anywhere that neglects the arts short changes its people.”*

**Sir John Tusa<sup>109</sup>**

Eighty per cent of our population lives in large towns and cities.<sup>110</sup> Museums, libraries and archives help to make these towns and cities better. As the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, put it, “places that were once the engine room of the industrial revolution, employing millions in mills, factories, ports and shipyards, are learning new ways to create wealth in a global economy where brain has replaced brawn”.<sup>111</sup> The museums, libraries and archives sector feeds this brain: in 2002, for example, of all neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion projects researched by a University of Northumbria study, 62.1% had large or very large museum involvement, 40.7% large or very large library involvement and 20.7% large or very large archive involvement.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to the social and cultural capital that the sector creates, it has a direct and measurable impact on employment and urban regeneration. Its contribution to the tourist economy has already been mentioned. Cultural institutions are the catalysts and figureheads of urban change. They attract and are used to attract. Quite often, major new institutional developments either constitute, or contribute to wider regeneration. Most famously, there is the so-called ‘Guggenheim effect’, a term derived from the success of the Guggenheim in helping to rejuvenate Bilbao. The UK can boast a wealth of similar successes: in London, for instance, the Stirling Prize-winning Peckham Library is comparably a regular feature in the literature of local estate agents,<sup>113</sup> and earlier, in Birmingham, the Ikon Gallery was at the heart of the Brindley Place development area.

There are many clear and well-documented cases that demonstrate the economic benefits of museums, libraries and archives. In Salford, the development of the

Lowry Arts Centre is estimated to have created 6,500 new jobs and – alongside other organisations such as the Imperial War Museum of the North – has contributed significantly to £90m worth of local commercial and retail development.<sup>114</sup> Likewise, Tate Modern has contributed between £75m and £140m to the local economy, a figure that far exceeds the 1994 estimates of £50m.<sup>115</sup> It is further estimated that its development has created between 2,000 and 4,000 new jobs, about half of which are focused in Southwark.<sup>116</sup> On a lesser scale, there are the incidental values of encouraging visitors to specific areas who will use and engage with local shops and services.<sup>117</sup> In a survey of 13,200 visitors to 126 British archives, for instance, 78.2% of users had used local transport, 36.2% had used local shops and services, 28.6% had eaten in local cafes and restaurants, and 17.7% had combined their visit with other local places of interest.<sup>118</sup>

Museums, libraries and archive developments have more environmental effects, too. The innovation of buildings commissioned by the sector reflects the creative nature of their function. Overall, the sector embodies change and renewal. Brighton's Jubilee Library, for instance, was the first winner of the Prime Minister's Better Public Building Prize.<sup>119</sup> Lottery-funded projects ranging in scale from The British Museum's Great Court, or The Forum in Norwich, to more modest – but much-needed – work such as the conservation of Lancashire's Quarter Sessions records marked the turn of the millennium.<sup>120</sup> Institutions like Norfolk's Time and Tide Museum, opened in 2004 and a runner-up to the Big Pit in the Gulbenkian Prize for Museums and Galleries of 2005, demonstrate the continuing growth of the sector.<sup>121</sup> There is consolidation as well as development: the country's oldest museum, the Ashmolean in Oxford, has received £15m to put towards a scheme that will double its exhibition space and provide new educational facilities.<sup>122</sup>

As much as they represent social and economic vibrancy, the very fabric of museums, libraries and archives reflects confidence, inspiration and growth. As John Sorrell, Chairman of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment has put it, "the fact is that the government's aspiration to bring about lasting change in the

cultural, political and social landscape of Britain is tied up with a very real transformation of the urban landscape".<sup>123</sup> From the Turner Gallery in Margate, to Gosport's new library, museums, libraries and archives are frequently the beating heart of such architectural enterprise. Lest it be forgotten, though, they are more than pretty faces: in Gosport, more than 1,000 new members joined in the first month, 40% of them under the age of 17.<sup>124</sup>

## 9 Physical, mental and social well-being

*“My contention is that diverting 0.5% of the healthcare budget to the arts would improve the health of people in Britain.”*

***Dr Richard Smith, editor of the British Medical Journal***<sup>125</sup>

The sector is also instrumental in delivering the objectives of health policies. On one level, with prevention being cheaper than cure, there are economic benefits of using the services that they provide. On another, there human considerations of equal importance.<sup>126</sup> When given a choice, many will prefer an activity such as reading to medication such as Prozac as a means to overcoming conditions like depression.<sup>127</sup> Libraries, in particular, are an obvious resource for the communication of information with regard to health matters: in Gateshead, a survey found that 48% of respondents had used the library service for health information.<sup>128</sup> On the one hand, this can be as simple as advertising services and opportunities relating to health; on the other, and especially when the benefit of anonymity is taken into account, books can be valuable and private reference points of more particular information. In Birmingham, for instance, the Central Library has established an Arthritis Resource Centre, offering information on cassette and translated into six languages, as well as a web-based resource for those unable to come to the library itself.<sup>129</sup>

The sector can be wholesome in participatory terms, too. As the comment from Dr Richard Smith shows, the strongest claims for this can come from outside the sector. Benefits to health have been the subject of a study conducted in Sweden, where it was concluded that attendance of cultural events, which included visiting museums and reading, gives attendees the advantage of living longer than non-attendees.<sup>130</sup>

Part of the World Health Organisation’s definition of health is ‘mental and social well-being’.<sup>131</sup> Museums, libraries, and archives are well suited, if not ideal, to contribute to this agenda, and therefore the Department of Health’s remit. They can ease stress, depression and anxiety.<sup>132</sup> The artefacts that they hold are, for instance, essential in preserving our memory of the past and can play a tremendous role in

interventional work with people suffering from memory loss.<sup>133</sup> Handling kits have been used to good effect with dementia patients in Glasgow, where participants were able to identify objects from their youth that had previously been a mystery to the museum personnel with whom they were working.<sup>134</sup>

Cultural engagement has also been proven both to have therapeutic benefits, and help people deal with illness and everyday social problems.<sup>135</sup> As with partnerships in other areas collaboration between museums, libraries and archives and health practitioners is now a developed area of activity. Creative practitioners partnered with cancer patients in Halton, Widnes to produce work that expresses the experiences of individual sufferers and, at the same time, combines creative production with therapeutic effect.<sup>136</sup> In 2000, in what BBC coverage called a 'novel remedy', Kirklees library entered a pioneering partnership with local doctors to provide bibliotherapy to those suffering from stress and mental illness: of 146 client participants, 86% were not previously using the library service.<sup>137</sup> At the National Archives, *There be monsters* – a project in which adults with experience of mental ill health worked with an artist to produce a sculpture – not only enabled users with mental health to engage with the collections, but also meant that the staff of the archives were able to develop their expertise in providing opportunities for subsequent visitors in a similar position. In terms of the direct benefit to health, the health professionals working with people engaged in *There be monsters* reported back enthusiastically on “the excitement and increased self-esteem evident in those involved”.<sup>138</sup>

## 10 Creating public value

*“A museum should thrive because it's the public's museum, and we work on behalf of the public.”*

**James Cuno, former Director of  
the Courtauld Institute,<sup>139</sup>**

The foregoing sections outline the clear evidence for the social and economic benefits that museums, libraries and archives deliver. As we have seen, the sector is defined by those who use it, the public; the people who manage it, the professionals; and the people who set its parameters, the politicians. To date, however, these different interests have rarely expressed themselves in a common language, or in a way that makes it easy to align their separate interests and obligations to a common goal. What has been lacking is a framework within which we can combine these different interests so as to satisfy the strategic concerns of the politicians, the scholarly discipline of the professionals and the social and educational needs of the public. What is needed is a methodology that has both practical application and meets strategic needs, and at the same time respects those humane qualities of experience that slip all too easily through the net of statistics, but which make the sector what it truly is. This methodology deploys the language of public value.

The ‘accountability’ of public bodies is defined by their capacity to deliver value to the public in whose benefit they operate. Visitors to museums, libraries and archives are not just consumers: they are citizens. Visiting them – and the expense of time and money that this entails – is an expression of personal will.<sup>140</sup> Museums, libraries and archives convert that personal will into a general public good.

As we have shown, far from seeing the sector as a burden, people are happy to see their money put to good use: taxes, it seems, are a small price to pay for so valuable an outlet for creativity. At the same time, the sector has a civic function in meeting governmental needs, and these are often economic and instrumental. As a result, museums, libraries and archives offer a complex balance of cultural value that

simultaneously meets the requirements of different parties in different ways.

Economics, alone, will not do this justice: to understand the true nature of the service that they provide, we need to understand how museums, libraries and archives are able to contribute so many different values at once.

These values exist in three different forms, and so cultural value plays out across three spaces:

- the *intrinsic*;
- the *instrumental*; and
- the *institutional*.<sup>141</sup>

The presentation and development of intrinsic value is critical to the sector's success in delivering instrumental value, and it requires sound institutional values to deliver the other two. Thus questions of funding apply to all three. Furthermore, the full range of value that the sector offers is in the interplay between them, and impacts upon several different areas: public interest, professional concerns, and political needs. By seeing value as a relationship between the intrinsic, the instrumental and the institutional, it becomes clear just how comprehensively museums, libraries and archives serve the needs of the various parties to which they cater.

### **Intrinsic value**

Museums, libraries and archives house material that has intrinsic value, and present it in a way that communicates that value.

Intrinsic value is the personal value of cultural experience to the individual. People are not drawn to an institution because their visit contributes to the area's economy, or even, for the most part, because they sense that it contributes to a national sense of a cosmopolitan self. They visit because it gives them pleasure, they want to see something specific, or they consider it generally edifying in a personal sense.<sup>142</sup>

Intrinsic value is therefore the value that attracts, and to which we all lean, but which we have difficulty in defining and describing.<sup>143</sup> For the same reasons, it is the most powerful and, in its impact, the most significant in rendering cultural experience effective. The intrinsic is those qualities that make us say “I like this”, “I need to find this out”, “this is what I am about” or “I want to do this again”. In particular, they are what make us decide to do something in the first place: it is the basic appeal of the sector. Museums, libraries and archives contain things we want to see and use, be it the *Rokeby Venus*, the books that we want to read, or the plans to the house in which we live.

As we have shown, this basic appeal and the value that it represents is one of the great strengths of museums, libraries and archives. This enjoyment and usefulness is the foundation upon which all other effects of museums, libraries, and archives are built, a quality that is often either lost in a hubbub of econometric and social claims, or dismissed as the argument defending ‘the arts for art’s sake’. At the highest levels, the Secretary of State for Culture, Tessa Jowell, recognises this simple fact in her plea that culture be valued in and of itself.<sup>144</sup> The same principle underlies our everyday use of the sector: an overwhelming 81% of teachers, for instance, recognise that value is derived ultimately from the children’s enjoyment of their visit, and the inspiration to which that leads. In the archives domain, the success of the mental health project *There be monsters*, lay ultimately in the excitement that it gave to participants.<sup>145</sup> As testimony to its appeal, the sculpture produced by the participants now stands permanently in the forecourt of the National Archives at Kew, a contribution in itself of intrinsic value.

“Why do so many parents take their children to museums and galleries?” asks Tessa Jowell. “Because of the value of what this exposure to culture gives them for the rest of their lives.”<sup>146</sup> These are intrinsic, as yet unrealised values, the worth of which is yet to blossom. It is of the intrinsic values of the sector that potential and the future are born.

## **Instrumental value**

The instrumental values of museums, libraries and archives are the ‘knock-on’ benefits such as local employment, tourism, boosting the local economy and so forth. They are also those that are most often sought by external parties.

The instrumental value of museums, libraries and archives is to be found in the wider social and economic contributions the sector makes to the public realm. As ‘positive externalities’, they are also the effects upon which the case for museums, libraries and archives often rests, especially in meeting governmental and funding objectives. The social benefits in particular have been enumerated in François Matarasso’s ‘Fifty Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts’.<sup>147</sup> Although his approach to evaluation has been progressed, the central values he identified remain essential to the policy debate of recent years. He outlined six areas of social benefit:

- personal development;
- social cohesion;
- community empowerment and self-determination;
- local image and identity;
- imagination and vision; and
- health and well-being.

As the examples listed above show, from Norwich library to Lincolnshire’s mobile library units and the handling kits in Glasgow, these areas of benefit are amply catered for by museums, libraries and archives. Museums, libraries and archives represent our *collective* social wealth: their content is both a national resource, and a national representation.<sup>148</sup> Enterprises such as the Rural Museum Network, or the partnership between the Natural History Museum, English Nature, and the Ramblers’ Association both represent and integrate our collective knowledge. The sector is a cornerstone of our social capital: not only does it give it physical form, it provides the means by which we can make our individual contributions to the common good. While schemes like the British Library’s book adoption programme, or museums’

friends groups help preserve institutions, they also reflect the active will of citizens to participate in building our historic capital.

Our cultural institutions also stimulate international debate. It is through heritage and artefacts that we can access what a culture is really saying to the world.<sup>149</sup> In 2005, the British Museum's Persian exhibition, for instance, was the stimulus and venue for debate about present-day Iran, casting the light of mysterious and colourful Persia on the shadowed, closed world of modern Iran, as portrayed by the media. As much as they are instrumental in our national society, museums, libraries and archives have a role in international relations too.

With overall visits to its institutions numbering, 625,186,003 each year, there are also economic benefits to the sector. The most recent estimates reveal that the sector employs 68,923 FTE staff, and 25,206 volunteers. This contribution is spread across the country: nationwide, local authorities employ 4,349 in museums, 1,146 in archives and 21,527 in libraries. There is also impact in monetary terms, the total income of institutions in the sector £1,271,439,314, and they put money back into the economy too: according to the latest figures, the annual spend of the sector is £2,422,008,007, a sum that, in employing suppliers like caterers, carpenters and so forth, plays out to have value in local economies.<sup>150</sup> In this way, the sector's institutions contribute in both social and economic terms that extend far beyond its immediate boundaries and on our society as a whole.

### **Institutional value**

Institutional value is the summation of the activity of museums, libraries and archives as deliverers of social service and economic value. As the site where the public engage with artefacts, books, or documents, the institution is the means by which the intrinsic can be related to the instrumental. Institutions are not passive receptacles of public value. In the way they interact with their customers, audiences, visitors, readers, they are positive generators of it. Museums, libraries, and archives are public spaces, and public spaces are public goods.<sup>151</sup> As the Office of the Deputy

Prime Minister has stated, public spaces are critical “in creating pride in the places where we live which, in turn is essential to building community cohesion”.<sup>152</sup>

Museums, libraries and archives contribute to quality of place, making a given area a more attractive place in which to live.<sup>153</sup> They are spaces for sharing and interaction in which people can contribute their own inflection. In London, Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall provides a place in which people of all ages and kinds can come together: it has also been adopted as a space in which different events and exhibitions have catered to equally diverse groups. Elsewhere, Norwich’s Forum is an entrepôt of socialisation and ideas: housing the Millennium Library, the BBC’s outpost in the region, a thriving restaurant, and several bars and cafes, it is a centre for knowledge and social activity at one and the same time.<sup>154</sup> Designed, in part by the staff, and open until 10.30 at night, the value of the space is the interaction that it facilitates.

The Forum also houses Norwich’s Information Centre, the Regional Screen Agency, a business library and a centre for advice on adult learning, and so represents the more basic, but indispensable values delivered by the sector. In this way, the library’s function can be as simple as providing logical places for notice boards, through to acting as centres for job-seekers and resources.<sup>155</sup> It also supplies magazines and publications essential to commerce and, at a more structured level, local businesses can take advantage of advisory services provided by the local library.<sup>156</sup> Libraries are thus established as logical spaces for the provision of community information. Coupled with their role as spaces for public gatherings, they are places in which communities can develop. As well as providing access to information, they can promote and facilitate collective activity and interaction between citizens: at Norwich, the Forum is also a space for fairs and events.

Museums, libraries and archives are sites where the public and the private can be intimately, and yet comfortably, combined. Where the institution speaks to the individual, and at the same time, the individual speaks to society. For the BBC’s *Who do you think you are?* we might read ‘this is who we are’. The opinions and attitudes archived and presented by the Museum of London are not simply voices: they are

*London's Voices*. It is in the archives, and in the museum and the library that our individual will to explore our private past grows into a collective understanding that extends far beyond the present, and on into a perception of society that is far more open and wide-ranging. Our society today is diverse and eclectic, comprising different beliefs, attitudes and opportunities. These are not *different* cultures, but the component part of *our* culture, a culture of which, as Tony Blair has said, we should be proud.<sup>157</sup> Museums, libraries and archives provide the sounding boards for this diverse, but unified culture.

Throughout, the sector's success in encouraging greater participation, more diverse audiences and contribution to wider agenda of regeneration and renewal has not detracted from its core value. They have maintained and polished their role as special spaces.<sup>158</sup> Museums, in particular, carry with them values and expectations of 'culture', sophistication and learning: they have social cachet. They are separate from day to day life. One of the central qualities that makes them valuable to society – the light that they throw onto other cultures – is also what can provide a respite from daily pressures. People can go to museums, libraries archives for the very simple reason that they are distant or, in relation to the everyday, exotic.

## **11 Conclusion**

The openness and flexibility of museums, libraries and archives cater to both the rigorously intellectual and the more hedonistic visitor, to the dedicated researcher and to one who is seeking the 'blockbuster exhibition', or simply to learn more about his or her family.<sup>159</sup> These different ways in which institutions engage with their visitors reflect an approach better suited to the modern world – the scholar can learn from projections of a mummy's interior as much as can the general public gain pleasure and value from investigating their family past.

Institutions like Peckham or Brighton libraries, Tyne and Wear Museum, or Abbot Hall in Kendal are totemic of social pride and feeling. Museums, libraries and archives have time and again proved the figureheads that attract people and

development to an area. It is the continuing attraction of what they provide that makes them effective in delivering the goods that they do.

Museums, libraries and archives are 'barometers of change', but this does not fully do them justice. As much as reflecting and responding to our society, they are integral in shaping and communicating its values. They create public value across our society. As people have grown to construct their identities in hybrid ways, museums, libraries and archives have adapted to play an increasingly important part as facilitators and mediators between the public, and the priorities of the politicians.

The artefacts and information that the sector houses, preserves and presents are wellsprings of our creativity, communities and identities. The innovation, imagination and professionalism with which museums libraries and archives do this, is what gives the sector its appeal. Their success lies in their success as a public service.

Without them, we would have very little to define ourselves as a society. They provide us with the means by which we can express ourselves as a culture, a culture made up of many different threads and contexts. Through their growing collections and the opportunities that they provide for us to contribute and participate, they also provide a means of sustaining that society and presenting it to the world at large.

Walk through the doors of a museum, a library or an archive and you can be confident that you will have the chance to learn, contribute and be inspired. By using different technologies, identifying and responding to social trends, and providing solutions for any problems potential users might have, the sector has actively extended the opportunity that it offers to more and more of our society.

Most of all, though, museums, libraries and archives give us opportunity and potential. They facilitate the means by which we can understand our past and our present and take that information to shape our future. They give us the capacity to make links between heritages, cultures, and ideas and so provide the warp from which we can take an active and creative part in weaving our future. Throughout

museums, libraries and archives have shown that, as well as delivering knowledge, they also provide the inspiration with which we can build our future success.

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