

Museums with learning at their heart would:

- Let their audiences learn by being part of *creating* the museum, as well as being consumers of its output. And that output too, would be driven by reaching the public wherever they are, getting away from the turn-stile thinking which says success is measured by numbers through the door. The museum would essentially listen as much as it speaks to the public; learn as much as it teaches; have an input channel as well as an output; and
- Make themselves *teachers* and learning *organisations* for the professionals as well as learning providers for the public. A museum based on learning would have a duty to spread innovation throughout the worlds of learning and culture. This would go way beyond sanitized good practice reports by welcoming risk-taking, innovation and, inevitably, failure, as potent learning tools.

By giving the museums' system inputs as well as outputs, it would also become a *dynamic* rather than a static one. Museums would become porous: defined by what they *do* as much as by what they hold: and able to take on contemporary issues like genetics, climate change, or terrorism: holding up a cultural mirror for modern society to reflect on its actions.

4-D is what museums would look like if they were designed from a learning point of view: places of imagination, exploration, debate, democracy and understanding for the public and the professionals – *all* of them on learning journeys with museums as their navigators, guides, and guarantors of safe passage.

So what would 4-D mean in practice? What new directions would it lead us in? Who would test them? And who would pay? We set out some ideas next. . . .

### Why Did We Do This?

Sometime during the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century we realised that the future of the UK relied on the creative talent of its people more than ever before and we began to talk in terms of the knowledge economy, lifelong learning and, most memorably: 'education, education, education'. For the first time, learning began to break out of the one-size-fits-no-one, mass-production education silo the Victorians had put it in. This industrial revolution model of education left us with a legacy that meant we got used to saying 'education is a schools issue'. Thankfully, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, learning has become important enough to be *everybody's* problem again, not something we can just delegate to the usual suspects, like schools.

This is where we stand today: at the start of a renaissance where learning infuses every area of life and is everybody's responsibility. And *that's why we did this*: because after looking at where this might lead us, we think the biggest single area of life where a learning opportunity is staring us in the face, is in museums.

## So What Now? – Some Practical Proposals

After promising ourselves we wouldn't stop short of practical ideas, here are some of the first. They're a place to start and we expect to add and subtract as we test 4-D learning against real life. Let us know what you think:

### Citizenship, Cohesion, Identity; and Culture

Museums' contribution to respect, tolerance, dignity and understanding in society; countering the effects of living in, but not engaging in, multicultural Britain by initiating, facilitating, and communicating stories of citizenship, cohesion and (multi) cultural life, via:

- *A cultural welcome to the UK for all new arrivals* – a bit like the best induction programmes you get when you join top-notch organisations: something to help you get your bearings and something that explains how things *really* work. And yes, it would be *created* by modern multicultural Britains, with their kaleidoscope of several hundred languages, dozens of religions, myriad ethnic groups, and countless outlooks on economics, politics, and society. The legacy would be a set of stories as powerful in explaining life in Britain *to other Britains* as they are at unmasking it for newcomers
- *Cultural gateways* – simply the result of taking the walls off the museum box and sprinkling them anywhere we want: so why not travel agents' windows with exhibitions of Greece and Egypt: GP's surgeries with explorations of genetics; or airport lounges with museums as an alternative to shopping for sunscreen? Just stop and think about the possibilities for learning

### Museums and Mental Health

Tackling prevention and treatment by promoting better emotional health and well being for everyone. Integrating self-esteem, social inclusion, participation, and life skills into every corner of our 2,500 museums and reducing the incidence of mental ill-health in the UK via learning programmes that:

- *Strengthen individuals* by providing access to social networks, nurturing relationships, offering safety and a friendly physical environment (museums are often used as neutral spaces, or refuges from the onslaught of modern life), building trust, and encouraging people to value and take control of their own lives (for example, by opening the channels of democracy in museums described here)
- *Strengthen communities* by giving access to resources and services, supporting carers, providing cultural life as a 'social vaccine' against mental ill-health, and underwriting: equity; involvement; access; social inclusion and integration with others in society

Our observation is that many of the best museum learning programmes already deliver this menu of improved mental health and emotional well-being. Underpinning this approach across the country could have a real impact on reducing the numbers of people diagnosed with mental health problems, currently around *6 million* a year. Isn't it about time we took our emotional health as seriously as we take our physical health? Museums can make a difference here.

## Use It or Lose It

Diffusing collections and stories into people's everyday lives: companies' headquarters, schools, hotels, shops, and living rooms across the land; inspiring and engaging people in a way unmatched by any other source and creating the capacity to collect modern stories and objects, for future generations, via:

- *A national learning loans programme* that simply shares out many of the estimated 800 *million* objects that are in museum basements across the land (almost never seen). Like an Open University for the cultural world, this would take our heritage to the people, rather than insisting they come to us. Simple really, and essential if we're to make space for democracy in museums and telling the tale of modern society for our children and theirs. There's practically no room for collecting new objects right now because the shelves are full, so if we believe in collecting new objects and their stories then we have to believe in sharing the ones we've got
- *A national volunteer learning programme* that is one of those everybody-wins scenarios: volunteers get to learn more about their passion; museums get skilled-up volunteers; the nation gets 50,000 people back into the habit of learning; and museum visitors get a better experience, underwritten by outstanding volunteers

### Democracy through Museums

Changing the approach museums take to their customers: transforming the public's role from being readers to being authors; from being consumers to being creators. Changing channels from one-way monologue to two-way dialogue, debate, and democracy, via:

- *Personal museums and community collecting* – letting society right into the heart of the institutions and engaging people from the basis of a personal museum: asking them to create a legacy of their own lives that would build into a community collecting programme – inviting everyone to fill our cultural memory banks (museums) for future generations and engaging them in debate about what's important in the simplest possible way, by *asking* them, not telling
- *Community curating and co-creation* – inviting anyone to trade places with the professionals and create their own museums from existing and new-found objects – a bit like the computer software industry trusts its customers to create, edit and evolve software in real-time (customers are the experts after all because they use the stuff). Museums would facilitate, mediate and communicate the results

There are many spin-off benefits of this kind of approach but, essentially, it would create a bond between society and its some of its public institutions that has been so much eroded in recent times: a route to debate and democratic participation.

# A Manifesto for Museum Learning

### One Last Thing

Have museums made you think? They made us think: that they could be a national learning network second only to schools; that the learning potential of *1 billion* objects and two-and-a-half *thousand* (learning) centres across the UK is unrivalled, overlooked and under-used.

And they made us think that all this potential just needs a little vision mixed with a pinch of courage and a drop of investment to release it.

We'll be working on that next.

## Questions, Questions

What are museums for?

Sounds an easy enough question until you try to answer it.

It's much easier to say what they *are*, or what they *do* but that's not the question we asked.

Trying to figure out what they're for, forces you to look to the future: to put away all the rationalisation and justification of what they are and re-imagine what they could be.

The cultural sector has not (yet) paused for breath in terms of examining where it's really going, like politics or economics has done in the past 20 years, and that got us thinking: what is the question to which museums are the answer? Where are they heading? What are they *for*?

Of course, it's much easier to ask questions like this than it is to answer them; but we weren't shy: we set out to find some answers.

This is the story of how we got on.

Let us know what you think.

### Who Do We Think We Are?

The Manifesto Group was conceived and convened by the Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries (clmg). It was a collective of creative thinkers about culture, learning and the future with no other agenda than to explore museums' role in society. The members of the group were:

Bill Lucas	Chair of the group: independent learning strategist and author
David Anderson	Vice-Chair and Director of Learning and Interpretation, V & A
Chris Wood	Group secretary and Development Manager, <a href="#">clmg</a>
Alex Stewart	Director, Museums, Galleries, Libraries and Heritage Group, DCMS
Charles Landry	Director, Comedia
Hilary Cottam	Director of Learning, Design Council
Gareth Binns	Director of Learning, NESTA
Lola Young	Head of Culture, Greater London Authority
Mary Bryden	Head of Public Affairs, National Museums of Scotland
Michael Jacobs	General Secretary, Fabian Society
Nick Winterbotham	Director, Leeds Museums and Galleries
Sally Bacon	Director, Clore Duffield Foundation
Tom Bentley	Director, DEMOS
Nicola Nuttall	Director, <a href="#">clmg</a>
Sue Wilkinson	Director of Learning and Access, Resource
Mark Taylor	Director, Museums Association
Chris Brookes	Chief Executive, Lifelong Learning Foundation
Paul Manners	Education Executive, BBC
Susie Parsons	Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning
Siân Morgan	Head of Education, DCMS

## What's So Special About Museums?

If we're looking at the future for museums, then what are the things we'd want to keep? What are the things that museums do better than anyone else? Especially if we're saying museums are about learning, for example, what makes them any different or better than schools, colleges, libraries and everyone else who has a claim to the learning crown? We need to know.

The easy answer is to say that it's the objects that define the museum-ness of museums. But then, libraries, theme-parks, shops and other institutions have objects and you browse around them in just the same kind of way as you do in a museum. We think it's what museums *do* with the objects that counts.

Theme parks like Disneyland use objects for entertainment, shops use artefacts for selling, but museums use artefacts for *understanding*.

What about people and buildings? Other organisations have those too. What's so special about museums there? Two things really: the buildings add to (or detract from) the experience; and the people are the spokesmen for the objects.

Objects almost never speak for themselves, they need an interpreter, so museums need story-tellers like universities need lecturers, or schools need teachers: as facilitators, counsellors, and guides to the latent learning. Could we reveal the richness of the objects without the people? No.

And is a museum still a museum if it doesn't have a building? Could a group of objects presented with thought in a village hall, or a company foyer, or on the web be a museum? Yes.

At their best, museums can tell us who we are, where we have come from and where we might be going. They are an antidote to short-term tabloid life: a cure for passive living; places whose role in today's uncertain society is more important than ever.

Museums work by story-telling: they confront us with the familiar and comforting and the new and challenging, inspiring us to look afresh at the world or grasp things that need imagination. Museums entice us to explore ourselves. They provide opportunities for testing out our ideas, for chance encounter, for discovery and for inventing things anew.

We question, we imagine and re-imagine, we see our place in the world, we discover, we reflect, we *learn*.

But surely schools and other institutions do this too? Yes, but we don't think it's the same because of the *process*: Museums are exploratory, diverse, informal, inspiring, and fun – purveyors of *learning in disguise* that appeal to all our senses.

So what does all this specialness mean for museums' future? We invite you to read on.

### How Much Are We Talking About?

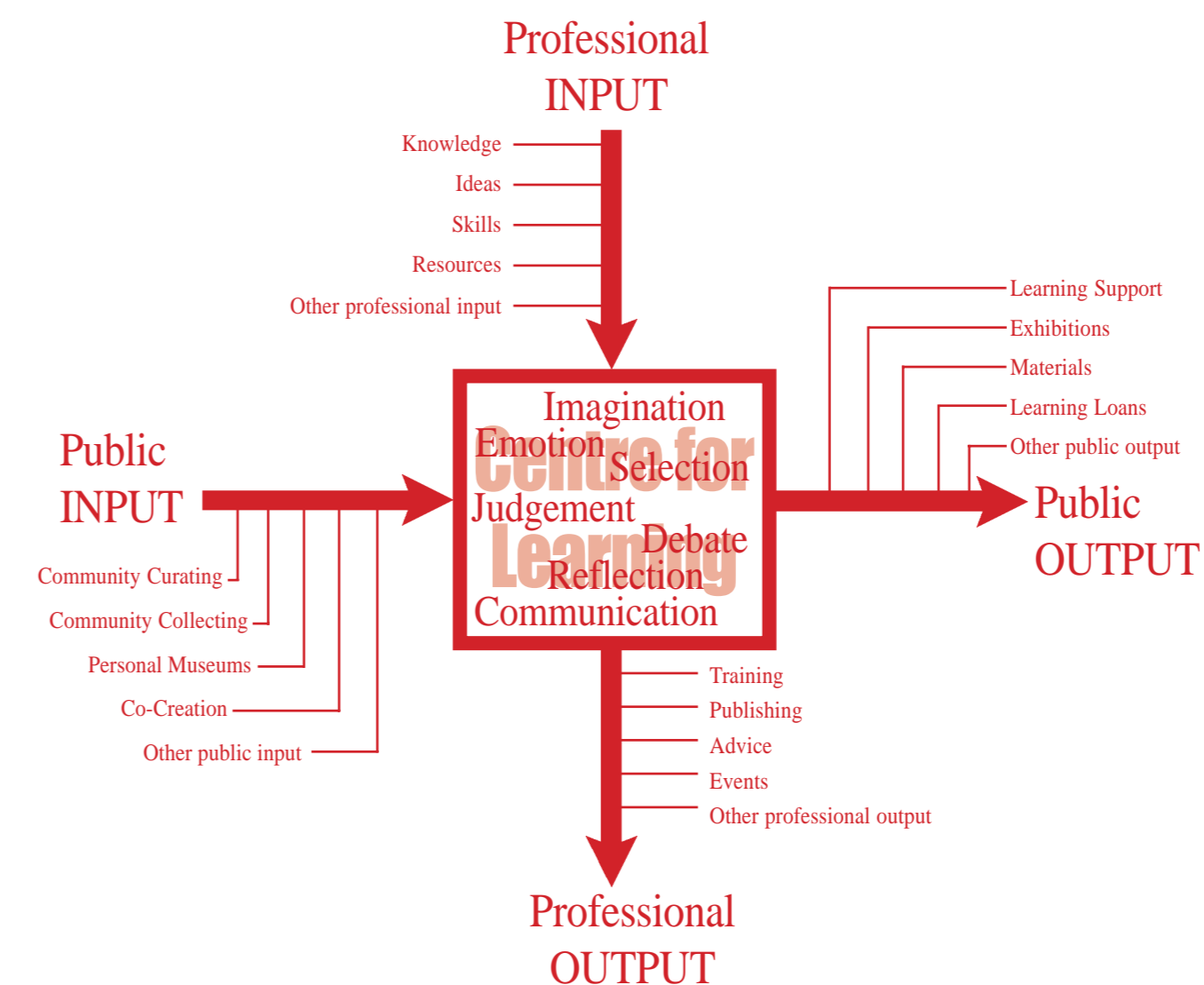
- o There are 2,500 museums in the UK, that's more than the major supermarkets *put together*
- o They hold around 1 *billion* artefacts in trust for society, that's about 17 things for every man, woman and child in the UK
- o Museums outnumber universities and colleges eight to one
- o Around 100 million visits are made to museums in the UK every year: that's more people through the turnstiles than football
- o Museums employ 50,000 staff, 50,000 volunteers and turnover around £1.5 billion per year

A sleeping giant in terms of learning, we think.

## Answers, Answers

Wherever we started from in looking at the future for museums, we kept coming back to learning as their reason for being. In that case, we wanted to know what a museum with learning at its heart would look like. If we started with a learning mission, rather than having it as an added extra to protecting objects, would a museum look and feel any different?

After a lot of debate, we thought it would look like this:



We call it 4-dimensional learning. It's essentially based on good learning being a two way communicative process, with as much listening as telling and as much input as output, all of which could be applied to *any* audience.

And remember, this is a model that applies to the whole museum network as a system, just as well as it applies to individual museums.

Why is that important? Because it's the collective learning effect of two and a half thousand museums and one billion objects that's so powerful.

The Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries ([clmg](#)) is a laboratory for new ideas in the cultural sector. If you'd like to help us take these ideas off the drawing board and on to the streets, or if you have some ideas to add or any comments on what you've read, please get in touch with:

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