

London 2012 Cultural Olympiad: *Stories of the World*

Kate Rodenhurst

Stories of the World was a major contribution to the Cultural Olympiad by the UK museum sector. Museums across the UK developed exhibitions with international themes, intended to 'welcome the world' to the UK in 2012. It was one of the original London 2012 cultural bid projects, presented at the time as the 'International Exhibition programme', and was also launched as part of the original 10 *Major Projects* for the Cultural Olympiad in 2008.

Stories of the World involved 61 museums, diverse in their size and structure, and including national museums, major partner museums (formerly hub museums), independents and local authority museum services.

Over 22,000 young people were involved as participants in *Stories of the*

World programmes, with more attending events and exhibitions. The programme created 130 exhibitions and around 5,000 events.

The programme was intended to create change across the sector, testing and embedding new practice in engaging people with collections. Dame Liz Forgan's vision for the project, published in the call to museums to apply to participate (September 2008) stated that:

The project aims to have three lasting effects: the UK's treasures will acquire a richer meaning for everyone who sees them in future; new thinking will be applied to traditional museum display; a young generation will connect in a new and deeper way with their own and their neighbours' heritage.

The programme was therefore designed to push forward progress on two key museum agendas: opening up interpretation of the collections to reflect a range of perspectives; and reaching young people, traditionally a hard-to-engage audience across the sector.

The vision enabled museums to be flexible in the way they chose to interpret *Stories of the World* for their own venues and audiences. However there were some common elements which were understood by museums to be at the heart of delivering *Stories of the World*:

- Involving young people as decision makers in museums, and giving them creative control
- Young people (aged 14 to 24) working directly with museum collections
- A focus on international collections
- Partnership working with source and diaspora communities
- Enhancing information held on collections databases
- Staging exhibitions
- Use of digital media and technology
- Staff training and development opportunities
- Revision of organisational policies on learning and access, and collections management.

Methodology

This paper explores how museums experienced *Stories of the World*, and the impacts the programme had on individual participants and on participating museums and the wider sector. It includes an overview of *Stories of the World*, and six case studies illustrating how the programme impacted on six very different museums.

It is based on the following:

- End of project returns from participating museums, providing quantitative and qualitative data about their *Stories of the World* activity
- A number of project evaluations carried out by participating museums or regional clusters at different stages of the programme
- Telephone or face-to-face interviews with fifteen staff across six museums, and the project manager at National Youth Agency
- Focus groups with young participants in Leeds City Museum and the Geffrye Museum
- Telephone interviews with two members of the national youth steering group for *Stories of the World*
- Attendance at the *Stories of the World* conference held at Museum of London in October 2012
- Background information provided by ACE, including the programme outline and criteria, evaluation frameworks, and communications guidance.

Headline findings

- The research found that *Stories of the World* made significant progress towards delivering the original project vision. There were lots of examples of good practice across the programme.
- *Stories of the World* has led to a significant shift in the ambition and quality of museums' participatory work with young people
- Museums had added interpretative material to their collections databases, and in some cases had enriched their collections with new accessioned material or specifically commissioned work.
- The extensive involvement of young people in exhibition design has pushed museums to innovate in how they display and interpret objects to the benefit of all visitors.
- Young people had been enthused and engaged in exploring collections, including using databases and working in collections stores, far beyond the original expectations of museum staff.
- *Stories of the World* has opened up valuable paid and unpaid work experience opportunities for young people, leading some to re-evaluate their education and career options.
- Participating in *Stories of the World* built the confidence and self belief of young people.
- There was some anecdotal evidence that *Stories of the World* exhibitions were driving increased visits from young people to the participating museums. However there was no evidence which suggested that *Stories of the World* exhibitions had led to increased audiences overall.
- As a result of the project, some museums have worked differently, and in many cases these changes in practice are becoming embedded. There is a commitment to continued co-curation with young people and to widening this work out to other audiences, in some cases backed up by restructuring, rewriting of strategies and policies, and continued facilitation of advisory panels of young people.
- As a result of the programme, museum staff with responsibility for youth and community engagement have been able to work much more closely and effectively with colleagues from other disciplines
- The programme has led to some skills development through the upskilling of staff in two areas: collections management and youth engagement, as a result of programme-wide support commissioned from Collections Trust and National Youth Agency.

Project Activity

Projects reported delivering a wide variety of activities as part of their *Stories of the World* programming, making use of the following approaches:

- Co-curating
- Advisory panels
- Internships and paid consultants
- International exchanges and global theming
- Creative activities
- Working with hard-to-reach young people

Co-curating

All of the museums involved young people in co-curating exhibitions with their staff, although they interpreted this differently, and some went further than others in the extent to which they gave young people decision making responsibility and access to the collections. Co-curating involved young people in researching objects and choosing which ones were to be displayed, writing text for exhibition panels, and making and commissioning creative content for the exhibitions.

Sometimes in order to do this, young people had to be trained in object handling, security and database management to the same standard as new members of staff. Most museums chose to create temporary exhibitions, but some, including Museums

Sheffield and Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, worked with young people to redevelop permanent galleries. Using the Revisiting Collections approach, young people's responses to objects were recorded within collections databases for future use.

Advisory panels

Many museums recruited young people to participate in advisory panels which operated as steering groups for *Stories of the World* activity. The young people who joined these access panels took part in projects, effectively operated as youth steering groups for each museum. Many museums established these groups with the intention that they would continue beyond the end of the 2012 exhibition, and they have carried out a range of activities, including advising on new capital development plans, reviewing museum policies, and auditing the quality of museum interactive materials.

Internships and paid consultants

Several museums offered internships or extended work experience opportunities to young people. Many of these were taken up by students on MA courses in Museum Studies, for example in the Geffrye Museum and Ironbridge Gorge Museum. MA students also took up opportunities to participate in

projects alongside younger group members, where they were able to lead elements of projects and be positive role models and mentors for other young people.

Some museums offered paid 'consultant' roles to young people, in return for them taking on additional responsibility within projects, such as carrying out background research or consulting other young people. This practice has been embedded in some organisations, with both London Transport Museum and the Geffrye Museum identifying new tasks for their paid consultants.

International exchanges & global theming

All of the *Stories of the World* projects focused on global themes, and how the collections in UK museums shed light on the UK's connections to the rest of the world. Museums chose to explore these links in a variety of ways. In Manchester and Luton, residential trips were organised to India and Pakistan respectively. Other museums developed relationships with international museums leading to object loans for *Stories of the World* exhibitions, for example Leicester's museums service borrowed objects from the China National Silk Museum. Several works were commissioned from international artists and accessioned into museum

collections. Other museums worked directly with source communities. For example Brighton Museum delivered a football project which involved filming with young people in Mali. Many more museums engaged with local diaspora communities. A relatively small number of museums developed projects which involved young people meeting and working directly with local BME communities, for example Durham Oriental Museum's young people interviewed elders from the Newcastle Chinese community. Other museums indicated that they saw this as a natural progression from their *Stories of the World* activity, which they intended to explore further.

Creative activities

Young people were involved in a huge variety of creative activities through *Stories of the World*, including:

- animation
- visual arts
- designing and making digital and hands-on interactives for use on gallery
- graphic design (exhibition panels and marketing material)
- spoken word/poetry
- photography
- flashmobs
- pottery and ceramics
- banner design
- jewellery design

- music composition
- comic books
- film
- audio guides/tours
- tour guiding
- gardening
- event management
- running creative workshops for young people and families

Working with hard-to-reach young people

The initial criteria for inclusion within *Stories of the World* specified that each partner museum should work with young people aged between 14 and 24, and specified a range of activities they should have the opportunity to take part in, which was based on early consultation carried out by the National Youth Agency (NYA). There was no specific requirement to engage young people from disadvantaged or hard-to-reach groups, and some museum staff interviewed felt that by definition, young people were hard to reach regardless of their background. However some museums did seek to address local needs and work with disadvantaged young people. For example, Norwich Castle Museum worked extensively with young people in the care system, and Brighton Museum worked with young people with mental health issues and a group who lived on a local housing estate that did not engage with the city's cultural provision.

Impacts on Young People

A range of impacts on young people have been identified, through projects' own evaluation and monitoring, and through the focus groups and interviews carried out as part of this research. An evaluation framework was devised by Collections Trust in 2009, and a simplified version was circulated later. While the intention was to collect data at annual intervals throughout the project, this was not done consistently and only one project-wide data collection exercise took place, in August 2012. Not all projects who returned data in 2012 could provide evidence of impact on participants. This reflects a lack of evaluation activity, or in some cases evaluation which was still ongoing and not yet available, rather than a lack of impact. Based on the available information, we can confidently describe the impacts of *Stories of the World* on participating young people in the following ways.

Firstly, young people extended their knowledge and understanding of museum collections. They were able to gain in depth knowledge about particular objects and collections, evidenced by their ability to write text for exhibition labels or otherwise respond to them creatively. The project also gave them an understanding of the purpose of museums and how they operate, something many

young people had not considered before. They were actively engaged in thinking about the ethics of collecting and display. Several of the projects took comparisons between historical periods and contemporary life, or British and global cultures, as a key theme, for example the Museum of London's exhibition on Roman London, and Durham Oriental Museum's Made in China exhibition. Young people were engaged in making connections and considering the relevance of museum objects to their own lives and identities.

Participants described a range of personal impacts resulting from their engagement with *Stories of the World*. They had become more confident in their own abilities, developing self-belief, and were more able to communicate with others in a variety of ways, including learning how to work with other young people in teams, and how to speak in public. Tour guiding seems to have been particularly beneficial as a way of encouraging young people to consolidate their new knowledge and develop their confidence.

Interviewees also referenced specific positive impacts in practical terms. They had been given an insight into how to behave in professional working environments, and learnt basic office skills which they felt would be valuable later on. Some had gained work experience (whether

paid or unpaid) specific to their chosen career, mostly in museums, but also through the museum linking them to other organisations. For school and college students, *Stories of the World* provided rich experiences which they could draw on when filling out university application forms.

There were a number of specific anecdotal examples which emerged through the evaluation process:

- A young volunteer at the Geffrye Museum who secured a job at a top London hotel
- A young woman who has completed two engineering placements after London Transport Museum helped her make contacts at Transport for London
- An unemployed volunteer at National Museum of Scotland who is now steward at Lauriston Castle
- A participant at National Museums Scotland who was facing homelessness and severe mental health problems, now making a strong recovery and back at school.

Impacts on Museums

Museum staff interviewed for our selected case studies were confident that *Stories of the World* had been a transformational

project for their organisations, and would have a long-term impact on the day-to-day practice of their museums. This was resulting from a change in the culture and the attitudes of staff towards public engagement work. Much of the fear around working with young people and opening up collections had been removed, and this way of working was generally seen to be of benefit.

This cultural shift was twofold: firstly, senior managers were engaged in the *Stories of the World* projects and interested in their progress, because of their strategic profile across the sector. *Stories of the World* offered an opportunity to be supported to experiment with new thinking about how to involve communities in interpreting collections. Secondly, the projects pushed staff from different departments to work together. Typically, community engagement projects are managed via outreach or learning officers and do not extensively involve curators. *Stories of the World* has broken down barriers between museum departments and increased shared understanding. Curators have worked directly with young people, while learning officers have learnt how to use collections databases and access stores.

There is considerable evidence of professional skills development happening formally through

Stories of the World, as all of the projects accessed NYA Hear By Right training, with eight museums gaining bronze or silver awards for their participatory work, and many also took part in Revisiting Collections training run by the Collections Trust. As most of the staff interviewed expected to work in this way again, and continue to involve young people and local communities in the interpretation of the collections, this training and support programme has clearly been effective in enhancing staff skills and confidence. However it is not clear to what extent this shift has taken place across the programme, and some museums may have moved much further than others towards this new model.

Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Members of museum staff interviewed as part of this research highlighted a number of successful methodologies they had adopted which they felt had contributed to the effective delivery of their projects. These were:

- Acting immediately on young people's suggestions – where they were simple to complete, and would improve the visitor experience

- Being open-minded about recruitment – projects can have a positive impact on young people regardless of whether they identify themselves as interested in museums, or are aiming towards a related career
- Having confidence that the objects and their stories would engage young people
- Having high expectations of young people – ‘the more you expect of young people, the more they achieved’
- The importance of having staff with a youth engagement specialism, to recruit participants, facilitate relationships between young people and other museum staff, and develop partnerships in the community
- Restructuring project development timetables so that there would always be something for the young people to do
- Creating structures and progression routes which enable young people to remain engaged over a long period, but also creating short projects to draw young people in or reach more disadvantaged participants
- Allowing young people to shape their projects to meet their own needs in terms of skills development and learning.

Programme Structure

Stories of the World was originally led by a project board, chaired by Dame Liz Forgan and including representation from LOCOG and MLA. The board was disbanded in 2010 as the programme was established. Museums were chosen to be part of *Stories of the World* through an application process overseen by the project board, with the final decision resting with LOCOG, who were responsible for allowing projects to use the branding licence. While this designation did not come with funding, successful applicants were allowed to use *Stories of the World* branding on their project publicity, and could access training and support to develop their programmes.

Stories of the World developed two strategic relationships, commissioning agencies to enable organisations to embed new practice rather than running one-off projects. The Collections Trust delivered training on their Revisiting Collections scheme, which works with museums to help them open up their collections to community groups and external experts, building a new understanding of their significance. National Youth Agency delivered training in youth engagement based around their Hear By Right framework, which supports organisations to put young people’s voice at the heart of service delivery. They

also facilitated a national youth steering group for the project.

The programme was delivered regionally, with each region adopting a theme which was interpreted flexibly by participating museums. For example in London, each of the four hub museums took a theme (Home, Identity, Journeys, and Place) which they then explored with smaller partner museums. The North West focused on textiles, while Scotland focused on global music.

Funding for *Stories of the World* came from a variety of sources, with the largest amounts invested by the Renaissance programme and Heritage Lottery Fund. The projects therefore had to align to the strategic priorities of Renaissance and other funders, as well as organisational strategies and the overarching aims of LOCOG and MLA/ACE.

NYA Hear By Right

In order to ensure that *Stories of the World* was a catalyst for longer term change in museums, NYA were commissioned to deliver training on a regional basis. This was based on their Hear By Right framework, which enables organisations to audit their practice in terms of youth involvement, and to develop appropriate action plans to improve their practice.

The research identified that museum staff valued the Hear By Right training, finding it valuable in shaping their projects in the early stages, and making sure that staff from a range of departments understood the strategic aims. Across the *Stories of the World* programme, staff from senior management teams, curatorial departments, marketing and design as well as learning, accessed Hear By Right training.

Hear By Right is based on framing young people not as participants but as leaders of their projects, and this happened at all levels of *Stories of the World*, including individual museum access panels, regional steering groups and fora for young people, and the National Steering Group. This was administered by National Youth Agency, and involved around nine young people (with some fluctuation in membership) in developing events which brought national partners together and raised the profile of the programme. The group organised two conferences, one based in Leeds in 2011, and one in London in October 2012, which explored the good practice which had emerged from the programme and the next steps necessary to secure a lasting legacy. The national steering group also organised a Parliamentary reception for *Stories of the World*.

For the steering group members, this was an invaluable opportunity to find out about other projects and ways of working, to swap ideas and to profit from being part of a major national programme. They felt that the steering group was genuinely youth led. The conferences and the Parliament events had been highlights for the young people who led them. They also spent time working on a manifesto for young people in museums, which sets out a core set of principles for youth led practice, in order to ensure that *Stories of the World* has a significant impact on a nationwide scale. They are still exploring options for rolling out the manifesto, possibly in partnership with Kids in Museums.

However, there was some concern amongst staff that the national steering group did not have the impact it could have achieved, because the young people were geographically disparate and lacked opportunities to get together as a group. There was some confusion about whether they were representing their region as well as their own local museum, and their ability to act as regional representatives depended to a great extent on how effectively their region's museums were co-ordinating and communicating their activities.

Collections management

One of the key objectives of *Stories of the World* was to engage a wider range of people in interpreting museum collections: young people, source and diaspora communities, and experts and academics outside the museums sector and outside the UK. Collections Trust training programmes based on their Revisiting Collections framework were rolled out across the programme.

As a result, museum staff reported that there had been significant change in the way objects were researched, and this research was documented, in *Stories of the World* projects.

Additional information has been added to collections databases, as a result of young people and curators carrying out further research. In some museums, digital versions of young people's creative responses have been documented and linked to specific objects on the database. For example the Geffrye Museum have young people's films uploaded onto their collections database. Museums have also collated responses from source and diaspora communities, so that databases now contain interpretative content from varied cultural perspectives.

This material was used extensively in *Stories of the World*

exhibitions, and led to changes in the way museums labelled objects within them. For example Durham's young curators developed a three tier labelling system which provided traditional curatorial interpretation, young people's perspectives and Chinese community perspectives for each object, presented on bilingual text panels. This is an approach which Durham Oriental Museum staff are keen to repeat in future exhibitions.

Regional co-ordination

There were mixed reactions to the regional structure of the programme amongst the staff interviewed. There was praise for the regional co-ordinators who had taken responsibility for driving the development of the programme in the early stages, developing curatorial themes, bringing partners together, arranging training, sharing best practice and commissioning evaluation. Yorkshire and London were highlighted as good examples of effective regional co-ordination. The programme had clearly been extensively affected at local and regional level by the transfer from MLA to ACE which happened in 2011, and the uncertainty which preceded it. In London, the regional project manager post was lost midway through the programme, and while staff in cluster museums stepped in to share the regional

co-ordination between them, it is clear that the projects had a stronger evaluation process and higher funding levels from 2009 to 2011 than they did towards the end of the programme. Staff reported that the extent to which the regional themes stayed relevant varied across the country, as projects evolved and were influenced by young people in each individual museum.

Funding was a concern for staff throughout the programme. In most cases interviewees had been able to access adequate funding, often at higher levels than was usually available to their special exhibitions programme. However the mixture of funding sources meant that each project was working towards a complex range of local, regional and national agendas. They highlighted the complexity of working on a programme which was layered with local community and youth organisation partners, a regional partnership programme, and an overarching national structure, when each of these layers was unstable and subject to changes due to restructuring and shifting political priorities.

This picture was complicated further by the evolution of *Stories of the World* as it developed. While the central theme – engaging young people and communities with world cultures collections – remained a constant throughout the project, other

aspects shifted considerably, such as the concept of *Stories of the World* as a 'Great Exhibition' for 2012.

National programme success factors

The research identified a number of factors which enabled *Stories of the World* to deliver meaningful shifts in attitudes and practice across the museums sector. These were:

- The programme's insistence that participating museums should set up mechanisms for the consultation and engagement of young people at the core of their organisation, and not just to inform specific projects
- The length of the *Stories of the World* programme enabled partnership development and experimentation and embedded new ways of working
- The requirement for staff at all levels and in all departments, to engage with the programme
- Flexibility in the model, which allowed museums to exploit the strengths of their collections and meet local strategic priorities and the needs of young people and communities
- Strategic support offered on an equitable basis across the country through Hear By Right and Revisiting Collections

- The deadline imposed by each museum's creation of an exhibition for 2012 sustained momentum throughout the project despite funding and other uncertainties

National programme – key challenges

This was a complex programme delivered in a time of uncertainty for the sector, and staff identified a number of challenges which affected the delivery of their projects.

Firstly, the programme had a confusing number of themes and aims, seeking to change museum practice in relation to young people, source and diaspora communities, world collections, interpretation on gallery, digital technologies, regional partnership working, international partnership working, workforce development and so on. One interviewee stated that he would have preferred the programme to be 'about one big thing'. Staff found projects difficult to deliver when they tried to meet all of these varied priorities, especially when they also tried to factor in other agendas, such as local authority strategies for young people.

Secondly, the nature of the exhibitions created, which were mostly based around objects held in museum stores, and creative interpretation by young people, while high in quality, did not

drive significant numbers of visitors. While an estimated 3 million people saw *Stories of the World* exhibitions, individual museums did not report higher visitor numbers against their own benchmarks. However anecdotally, they did believe that young people were visiting their museums in greater numbers to visit *Stories of the World* exhibitions, possibly as a result of word-of-mouth recommendations.

Thirdly, the lack of secure funding for the programme was a significant issue, as was the changeover from MLA to ACE. Staff praised the programme managers at MLA and ACE for being approachable, positive and supportive throughout the process. However it was difficult for projects to engage in long-term strategic planning in these circumstances, and there was not a smooth build-up of activity, profile and funding as 2012 got closer. There were practical impacts for museums resulting from these changes. Managers were concerned about the amount of time project staff were spending on paperwork as they were reporting to multiple funders. Removing MLA branding from materials created through the project was also an issue.

The evaluation of *Stories of the World* was similarly affected by these changes. The programme was evaluated from the start, but

the evaluation framework was amended midway through the project, and data collection activity was not contracted out as anticipated. As a result the quality of evaluation and monitoring is patchy, with some organisations having commissioned extensive evaluation while others have self-evaluated, and some have collected the bare minimum of quantitative data. Regional approaches to evaluation varied, with some regions collating their data into one regional return while others offered venue by venue data.

Stories of the World and the Cultural Olympiad

All of the interviewees were confident that *Stories of the World* would not have happened without the Cultural Olympiad. The situation of *Stories of the World* within the Cultural Olympiad drove project managers to be more ambitious, raised the status and profile of youth engagement and co-curating approaches within their museums, and provided staffing and funding at a time when it would otherwise have been very difficult to secure. They were keen to participate because they knew that the opportunity would not come up again. They noted how participation in the Cultural Olympiad had created strategic buy-in for the project at senior management level and the

deadline created by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games prevented projects from drifting. Museum staff also reported that the link to the Olympic Games was a hook which helped them to engage young people in the projects, because they wanted to be part of a national initiative and assumed that the quality would be high. However in the main, *Stories of the World* did not make direct thematic connections to the Games. The exceptions include Ironbridge Gorge, which themed much of its programming around sport, the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, who created a project on the Ancient Greek Olympic Games, and Museums Luton, which ran an object exchange programme through approaches to Olympic and Paralympic committees. Further, the Cultural Olympiad opened doors for museums which were seeking to make new international connections, giving their projects weight and credibility.

There were a number of issues which arose from *Stories of the World* being part of the Cultural Olympiad. Many of these related to the branding and marketing of activity, and examples include:

- The University of Durham's legal team initially advising Durham Oriental Museum not to take part, because they would have to sign a contract which threatened unlimited fines for breaching the branding regulations.

- Several interviewees felt that the London 2012 Festival, which only included four *Stories of the World* exhibitions, had a negative impact on the profile of the programme. One interviewee stated that 'the Olympics were so massive that *Stories of the World* never had a chance to compete'.
- It was difficult for museums to acknowledge their local partners because of LOCOG guidelines.

Interviewees did not report the Cultural Olympiad being a significant motivating factor for participating young people after the initial connection had been made, and described the positive and negative aspects of the Cultural Olympiad as finely balanced.

The Cultural Olympiad was a benefit because it was timed. It was a hook for the young people to be part of something big. But you had to start by explaining to young people what the Cultural Olympiad was – they needed to be a bit more savvy about branding it. It was hard for young people to understand why if they were such an important part of the Cultural Olympiad, they couldn't get involved in other things such as the Torch Relay, difficult to manage their expectations. (Museum project manager)

One young person from the national steering group summed up the role of the Cultural Olympiad thus:

It gave us a platform but we need to make sure we don't need to wait for another big celebration to make it happen again.

The Legacy of Stories of the World

Museum staff referenced a range of ways that *Stories of the World* learning and practice will continue to be implemented across the sector.

Firstly, staff are now trained and experienced in working with communities as co-curators. There is also a cohort of graduates and postgraduates whose earliest experience of working in the sector has involved immersion in these new approaches. However there was some concern at the uncertain future facing many staff who had delivered youth engagement and curatorial roles within *Stories of the World*, as funding streams from Renaissance come to an end.

Staff referenced a range of ways they would like to build on *Stories of the World* practice in the future, including: using consultation panels to advise on future strategy; creating projects

in which young people and diaspora communities work together to interpret collections; widening out the methodology to other groups including local history societies and community organisations; developing projects with more challenging groups of young people. All of the case study museums were actively seeking funding to create staffing structures to embed the new practice. Some were completing evaluation documents, advocacy materials and toolkits for publication, to share their practice with others. A number of museums referenced practical steps they would be taking to embed *Stories of the World* practice, for example adding youth engagement to staff forward job plans and involving young people in the recruitment of relevant staff (Horniman Museum), and supporting young people to form their own constituted group (Hackney Museum).

Several interviewees referenced the impact the project had had on partnership working, and were looking for opportunities to continue to work with their regional and local partners. The centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in 2014 is an obvious focus for museums seeking to work together. Museums Sheffield has signed a formal partnership agreement with University of Sheffield for the next four years. At national level, there is potential for the

steering group's work around developing a young people's manifesto for museums to continue to be rolled out, possibly through engagement with Kids in Museums.

Dedicated case studies

Project: Journeys of Discovery

Museum: Durham Oriental Museum

At Durham Oriental Museum, 289 young people immersed themselves in the museum's extensive collection of Eastern art, from Egyptian mummies to Japanese Manga. They worked on a variety of short-term projects, and curated two large scale exhibitions, one on illness and medicine, and another in 2012 which focused on the museum's Chinese collections. The exhibitions were curated by a core group, made up of local young people working alongside MA students from the University of Durham's Museum and Artefact Studies course, and involved 36 representatives from the local Chinese community. In addition to the positive impacts of participation for young people, *Stories of the World* has been a significant learning and development process for staff at the museum.

Durham Oriental Museum is part of the University of Durham.

Collecting began at the university in the 1940s in order to support the teaching of the School of Oriental Studies, and there is now a substantial collection of objects representing the art and cultures of the Middle East, India, China and South East Asia, housed in a purpose-built museum on campus. The museum has previously run community projects worked with young people, largely run by the learning team, but on a limited basis. *Stories of the World* offered the museum an opportunity to increase the scale of its engagement with young people, and to test out new approaches which involved the whole staff team.

From the start, the Durham team were committed to placing curatorial practice at the heart of their *Stories of the World* project. They developed a set of objectives for their *Stories of the World* projects stating that they would:

- Be youth-led, -directed and -curated
- Open up collections in their entirety
- Be object intensive
- Involve source and diaspora communities, and
- Think about objects in new ways, including digital.

This focus on curatorial practice influenced decisions about how the projects should work. Firstly,

the museum made a decision to train the young people in object handling and database management, using their staff induction training as a framework. Once the young people had been trained, they were given extensive, supervised access to the museum's database and the collection stores. The comprehensive nature of this training was of significant benefit as it allowed young people to approach the project as a curator would, leading to less intervention from staff and a greater sense of empowerment and deeper outcomes for the young people. For example, the young people made their own assessments of which items were too fragile to be displayed, and devised alternative solutions such as using photographs and animation on gallery. This approach also had the benefit of freeing up time, as objects were viewed by young people in situ and did not have to be moved for handling purposes.

Training and access to the object database enabled the young curators to develop an overview of all the material which was potentially available to them, and to make informed decisions about the themes they wanted to explore in depth. While curators had concerns that using the database would be perceived as 'dry' or 'boring' by the young people, it was actually one of the most successful elements of the methodology. Giving young

curators extensive access to the database and collections stores meant that exhibition objects were chosen from store, and each exhibition enabled the public to see new objects which would not ordinarily be on display. Disruption to the museum's permanent galleries was minimised.

Young people had a rounded experience of the collections, and experienced best practice approaches to interpreting objects, when they worked directly with the Chinese community to help them curate the *Made in China* exhibition. Regular meetings were held between the young curators and members of the North East Chinese Association, Teikyo University of Japan, and Chinese Student Association of Durham. Joanna Walker, aged 18, has developed ambitions to travel to China and study its culture as a result of her contact with the Chinese community in Newcastle. Other young people who took part in the project have since applied to the University of Durham for undergraduate study, or have developed ambitions to work in museums.

Staff at the museum are confident that this approach, in which young people were treated as equal collaborators, has had a significant impact on their development. They were trusted and given responsibility, and as a result have achieved much more

than they thought they were capable of, developing their time-keeping and organisational skills, making new friendships, and learning how to speak in public.

Stories of the World has had an equally significant impact on the museum. Firstly, the museum is rethinking its approach to working with young people, and is currently seeking funding for new posts with the learning team in order to embed the *Stories of the World* methodology and enable future projects to be delivered with youth involvement. Secondly, the museum will adopt some of the fresh thinking on interpretation which was developed by the young curators. For example, the young curators devised a triple-layered labelling system for objects, featuring the database description, their own interpretation, and content from the Chinese community. All of the exhibition labelling and publicity was produced in English and Chinese. They also tested and adopted the RNIB penfriend as an alternative to traditional audio guides.

At a more strategic level, the project has been valuable in raising the profile of the museum within the university, something which museum staff credit partly to the Cultural Olympiad, as for some time *Stories of the World* was the university's only project linked to the London 2012 Games. Over time, the museum has demonstrated clear links to

the university's strategic aims, particularly with reference to attracting more young people from the local area to apply to study there. The North East and Humber region has the lowest levels of participation in higher education in the UK, and it was hoped that the MA students may act as role models for the young participants, many of whom were studying for A levels at the time. The MA students benefited from additional work experience in the museums sector, at a time when competition for entry level posts is fierce. This met the university's strategic commitment to create 'opportunities for personal development in our residential College communities, ensuring future success and employability'.

Project: At Home With the World

Museum: The Geffrye Museum of the Home

The Geffrye Museum in Hackney focuses on the urban homes and gardens of the English middle classes. The galleries are presented as a series of living rooms, each decorated in the typical style of the period, from the 1600s through to the 1990s, complemented by a sequence of period gardens and a walled herb garden. The Geffrye has had a long-standing commitment to developing a variety of placements and work

experience opportunities for young people, and they used their *Stories of the World* programme to increase the number of placements they offer, and to open up other development opportunities to young people through a youth access panel and paid consultancy roles. Young people took on a significant advisory role in the development of *At Home With the World*, the Geffrye's main temporary exhibition for 2012. Enabled by extensive buy-in from senior management, they are now involved in developing plans for the Geffrye's new capital development scheme.

The Geffrye Museum was part of London's *Stories of the World* programme, and led a cluster of smaller museums who all developed work around the theme of 'home'. This was seen as a significant opportunity for the Geffrye to make a shift from traditional museum practice towards collaborative working. As such, it had strong support from the Geffrye's director and senior management team. In the early stages of *Stories of the World*, the director was involved at regional level, and senior staff from all departments took part in NYA's Hear By Right training programme. Strategically, the Geffrye had a number of aims for its involvement in *Stories of the World*. They wanted to create a more audience focused approach to programming, in exhibitions as

well as public programmes, moving participation out of the education department and establishing it as practice in all audience-facing departments. They also wanted to improve cross-departmental working within the organisation. There were also specific aims relating to the development of their existing programmes for young people: improving their skills; raising their awareness of opportunities in museums; and bringing them into the museum as audiences.

Prior to *Stories of the World*, the Geffrye had an established programme for young people, mainly structured around projects with youth groups and provision of activities at weekends and holidays. They had also established a team of young tour guides, many of whom were Hackney residents. As a starting point for *Stories of the World*, they established a youth panel, recruiting through their website, flyer distribution and networking with local youth organisations and agencies. The panel met at the museum regularly, and successfully developed a range of projects. For example, they designed and ran a day of family activities which attracted a high number of visitors. They also worked on a number of digital projects, including the design of gallery interactives, made short films, and collected stories. Many of the project's digital outputs have now been added to the collections

database. In addition to the work of the panel, a number of other creative projects, many based on poetry and film, were developed with local youth organisations.

A smaller number of young consultants was recruited from the pool of young people who had previously engaged with the Geffrye. They were paid to attend additional meetings with staff, to carry out background research and consult with other young people, and to take on a more structured role in delivering the project. There were also three paid internships created for young people who had completed museum related MA courses. The interns took on specific roles in either learning or curatorial departments, working on *Stories of the World* projects.

It is clear that the process of working with young people so extensively over a long period, supported by a staff training programme which reached across departments, successfully built trust between museum staff and young people, evidenced by the fact that the young people were allowed to run public tours of the collections stores during the *At Home With The World* exhibition. The involvement of young people in shaping *Stories of the World* as advisers and consultants is considered by the museum to be a very effective way of working, and there is a desire to extend this approach to other audiences. The Geffrye is committed to

continuing with its provision of training for young people via internships and placements. They have a comprehensive programme of placements for young people from KS4 to post MA level. Currently, they are bidding to the HLF Skills for the Future fund to create four new training posts, including roles in learning, collections management and heritage gardening.

I think to start with, not necessarily in the education department but in other parts of the museum that were working with us, to start with they didn't know what to expect from us, and now I think they really value our opinions, so that shows that by getting involved in the development of the museum, we have made a valuable contribution for the future. (Focus group participant)

However the immediate impact to the museum has been in changing the way in which it carries out strategic planning and development work. Young people who took part in a research focus group were confident that the Geffrye took them seriously, listened to them, and acted on their feedback. They meet regularly with the museum's director.

The Geffrye is currently developing a major capital project requiring significant external fundraising, and the youth panel has been very involved in that process. They are given access to documentation such as draft funding applications, and encouraged to suggest additions and amendments. They have met the project's architects to discuss their ideas, and visited the architects' office to view the model. One focus group participant stated that 'when we give our opinion or idea they put that idea in', and it was clear that the group felt they were making valuable contributions to the project. The group are also being consulted about education policy and activity planning.

As a result, Alison Lightbown, Head of Learning and Education at the Geffrye, describes the venue as 'outward looking and audience focused, because *Stories of the World* has built our confidence'.

Project: Treasured: Smuggled, Stolen, Saved?

Museum: Leeds City Museum

***Treasured: Smuggled, Stolen, Saved?* was an exhibition curated by young people at Leeds City Museum. It explored how objects in the collections had travelled to Yorkshire, raising questions about the ethics of collecting, and asking**

visitors to make up their own minds about these contested issues. Through the process of curating the exhibition, staff and young people engaged in detailed discussions about the objects on a case-by-case basis to decide on the most appropriate way to interpret and display contentious material. This has demonstrated the need for updated collections policies which reflect changes in museum practice and wider society since they were originally written.

Leeds City Museum ran a number of projects under the banner of *Stories of the World*, as part of the Yorkshire region's programme. Titled *Precious Cargo*, the regional programme sought to explore how objects from around the world have become precious items of Yorkshire heritage. While Leeds had a strong track record in developing outreach and community engagement projects with socially excluded groups, they had done little previous work with young people outside their formal learning programme. This was an opportunity to explore whether they could create an offer young people would want to access.

In 2012, after a number of very successful smaller projects, Leeds City Museum offered its largest temporary exhibition space to a group of 17 young people, recruited through schools, colleges, word-of-mouth and

open days at the museum. They worked closely with the museum's Learning and Access Officer and curatorial team to explore the collections stores to identify objects with interesting histories, and particularly journey stories. The objects they chose ranged widely and included items from anthropological and natural history collections. They then created an imaginatively presented exhibition, which welcomed visitors into an 'airport' themed introductory area before taking them on a journey around the collections. The young people delivered all of the tasks necessary to stage this exhibition, including developing themes and content, writing text, designing marketing and family programmes, and installing the exhibition itself.

Young people were very keen to explore how objects came to be in the museum's collection, and this became the theme of the exhibition. Having chosen this theme, the objects they wanted to show were inevitably contentious and challenging. For example they included human remains, objects taken from tombs, and objects illicitly traded. The curatorial team did not seek to avoid controversial or difficult subject matter, and instead welcomed the opportunity to open up discussion and work through the issues together with the young people as equal partners in a process.

Two examples serve to illustrate the type of issues which arose through this process:

- The group wanted to use an Ecuadorean shrunken head within the exhibition, in a section which featured human remains. One young member of the team worked closely with the curator and an archaeologist to research the object, and wrote the accompanying text. In a separate project, a group of art students were commissioned to create an animation demonstrating how the head was made and its purpose. Both the group and the marketing professionals working on the exhibition wanted to use the very striking image of the shrunken head on the publicity material for the exhibition. However, museum policy prohibits the use of human remains in an insensitive context, including for promotional purposes.
- Young people wanted to title a section of their exhibition 'Tomb Raiders'. This was contested by museum staff who felt that the use of such language was inaccurate. However, the context clearly was that objects in this section had been taken from tombs, and museum staff and young people agreed on a compromise by which the title could be used, if the accompanying text clarified the context.

This process of discussion and negotiation was a huge learning opportunity for both the young people and the museum.

There are artifact human remains that you can put on a poster because they've been turned into something else. You can use a mummiform but not a mummy. So we needed to look at the detail of every single object. We... needed to have a dialogue with senior management and some of the curators to decide what to do. The young people came on that journey with us. (Helen Langworthy, Exhibition Curator)

The willingness of the museum to open up dialogue made the exhibition development process much richer and more valuable for the participants. Esther Amis-Hughes, the museum's access and learning officer, felt that 'it was valuable that there were problems that we all had to overcome and negotiate. We now have a group of young people that are knowledgeable and really careful and sensitive towards human remains.'

Treasured has led to significant organisational change at Leeds City Museum. Firstly, the visitor welcome for young people has improved significantly, and there is some evidence the numbers of young people visiting this exhibition were higher than other previous exhibitions (although it is difficult to find appropriate figures from previous temporary exhibitions to benchmark

against). Museum staff described the young exhibition team as developing a strong sense of ownership of the museum.

Museum staff across all departments have worked in a completely new way as a result of this project, learning how to let young people take over their job role, and supporting them to be successful without imposing their own views.

People had to step away from something they are trained to do, and love to do, and are paid to do, and let someone else who isn't trained do it for them. (Helen Langworthy)

They were prepared to make practical changes, such as working evenings and weekends, to meet the requirements of the group. The project laid some fears to rest, particularly assumptions that working with young people, for example on the installation of the exhibition, would create health and safety risks.

When I started the project I had no idea what participation meant, it was a very different way of working for me. Usually I have the creative idea and I call an artist and they make it happen, but this time the young people had the creative idea and I had to make it happen. (Esther Amis-Hughes)

Museum policies and practices have been tested through the process. As a result, it has become apparent that collections policies were not clear enough and did not reflect changes in society, such as the widespread use of the internet. Other policies, such as the museum's approach to unaccompanied children, have also come under scrutiny, resulting in a 'more relaxed, commonsense' approach.

Senior managers within the museum have welcomed the project, and managers have met with the group regularly. They are continuing to meet, and the group is currently working on an audit of interactives across the museum, with recommendations for improvements. They will also be offered opportunities to work on significant forthcoming programmes: Yorkshire's response to the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, and a new exhibition about Asia.

Project: World Stories: Young Voices

Museum: Brighton Museum and Art Gallery

Brighton Museum and Art Gallery chose to use *Stories of the World* as the catalyst for the full redevelopment of their permanent gallery of world art, including objects from Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. Staff at the museum

were concerned that the gallery was too academic in its interpretation and did not engage the majority of visitors. *Stories of the World* offered an opportunity to reinterpret this gallery in a much more accessible way, using the response of young people and source communities to the objects to open up the collections. The museum recruited a panel of young people to steer the project, and they advised on displays, marketing, and events. The content development was managed through a number of standalone projects, many of which engaged young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The gallery was selected for inclusion in the London 2012 Festival. Evaluation suggests that this led to significant outcomes for the participants. Brighton Museum has now secured a youth engagement officer post until at least 2016 in order to continue this work.

Brighton Museum and Art Gallery is a local authority museum, part of a group of museums across Brighton and Hove operated by Brighton and Hove City Council. For *Stories of the World*, they focused their attention on their designated world art collection, displayed within the James Green Gallery of World Art. The gallery, which had been redeveloped in 2002, was focused on the visual qualities of the objects, which

were spotlit with minimal interpretation. Non-user research carried out in 2006 had demonstrated that the gallery was unappealing to young people, and the young people who did visit tended to be art students. *Stories of the World* offered Brighton Museum an opportunity to revamp this gallery and make it accessible and interesting to a wider audience, and in particular young people. An additional significant consideration was that Brighton and Hove had been identified as an area with particularly high proportions of people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and the City Council's Employment and Skills Plan had identified this as a priority to be tackled by organisations across the city.

Early audience research carried out for the project suggested that young people and other visitors wanted the same things from the gallery redevelopment – more interactivity, information presented through a range of media and not just text, more contextual information about how the objects came to Brighton, and clearer theming and pathways through the gallery. This meant that the museum could go ahead and involve young people in shaping the gallery, confident that the resulting exhibition would appeal to a wide audience.

The museum developed a core group, the Museums Collective. This group remained constant throughout the project, although some members came and went. They advised on gallery plans, marketing and events. In addition to the work of the collective, a number of projects were developed with groups of young people. These were shorter term projects which resulted in the development of content for display on gallery. These projects sought to work with hard-to-reach young people, including refugees and asylum seekers, and those living in disadvantaged communities.

There are seven 'stories' within the gallery, and each one includes interpretation by young people:

- Art in Mind, a group of young people with experience of mental health issues, explored masks and sculpture from Papua New Guinea and made their own sculpture.
- Whitehawk Art Group, based on a housing estate just outside Brighton city centre, investigated a collection of objects from Peru and created a spoken word piece.
- Young people from Albion in the Community, the charitable arm of the local football club, worked on a football themed project which compared their experiences with those of young football fans in Mali.

- Pupils from Year 9 at Patcham High School made a stop-frame animation based on collections from the Arctic.
- A group of young Iranians living in Brighton responded to Iranian objects from the collection and advised on acquisitions of contemporary art from Iran.
- The museum engaged with young people from the Kachin community interviewing young Kachins in Burma and London for a film shown on gallery.
- A group of young refugees and asylum seekers in Brighton worked on photographic projects, and some of their work was featured in the introduction to the gallery.

The gallery development process was evaluated by consultant Nicky Boyd in 2012. She carried out focus groups with young people and interviews with youth workers and key staff (quoted below) which identified the following outcomes for the participants in the projects. The project had successfully changed the attitudes of participants who were not previously museum goers. There was considerable evidence of learning and skills development. Young people were in some cases learning about places and cultures they had never heard of before. They developed a range of practical and creative skills, working with new art forms and learning about how museums work and how

exhibitions are developed. They had a sense of pride in their work, and were more comfortable in the museum space, having developed a sense of ownership. Youth workers also felt that they had grown in confidence, become more willing to try new things, and improved their communication skills.

I think they are on some level learning a lot of social skills where they are discussing what has gone on in their lives and how they can cope better with life and their mental health issues and what's going on there. Again, that's quite subtle and it's not necessarily an explicit kind of goal. They are developing those life skills and it's helping them cope.
(Group leader)

Museum staff believe that the project has had a significant impact on their own learning and development which will influence their future practice. The methodology for the project brought learning and curatorial staff together to develop the exhibition, and there has been a growth in understanding across the two disciplines. This was learnt the hard way, and internal evaluation highlighted the need for an open dialogue at the start about the meaning of 'co-curation' and clearer agreement about decision making processes. Staff felt that they could have

gone further in allowing young people to take the lead and that next time, young people could be more directly involved in choosing objects. In the main, curators chose the themes and objects for inclusion and young people developed the interpretation around them. However one of the most successful mini projects was the football themed section of the gallery, where:

‘the young people had a lot of freedom to decide what went into the galleries and then choose the objects, this was one of our key aims for the whole gallery and it didn’t really happen – but in this one it did, and they really engaged with the subject matter... the subject matter was genuinely relevant to young people’.

The project has demonstrated that involving young people in developing exhibitions and programming can improve the visitor experience for everyone, and that young people’s interests and needs are shared by other visitors. As a result, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery has committed to working with young people in the future, and the post of Youth Engagement Officer has been extended to 2016, enabling the Museums Collective youth panel and further projects with disengaged young people to continue. The

museum is keen to go further next time, offering young people more decision making power and more responsibility in future programmes, and facilitating joint working between young people and source communities.

Projects: Truck Art and Vardo Art

Museums Luton

Museums Luton is part of a cultural trust which also manages Luton’s libraries and arts provision. It comprises Wardown Park Museum and Stockwood Discovery Centre, which boasts an extensive transport collection featuring a large number of cars and carriages. The borough of Luton is very diverse, and includes an urban population, of which around a quarter of residents are Asian. Within the Asian community, about half of these residents are Pakistani. There is also a smaller rural population which lives within the borough, and the history of the local area is rich with rural and traveller community heritage, as well as a more recent industrial heritage linked to manufacturing. However, the diversity of Luton’s population is not reflected in the visitor profile of its museums. Museum staff had long-held aspirations to develop an international profile, and *Stories of the World* offered an opportunity to combine this with a more proactive approach

to reaching Luton's diverse communities. Previous project work had taken place with local young people, but this was not embedded into the organisation's core activities. The museum staff developed a number of projects which addressed these key opportunities for development, using *Stories of the World* to move forward in delivering their ambitions for the service.

Truck Art and *Vardo Art*, two closely connected *Stories of the World* projects, drew parallels between the two folk art traditions. The projects included an extensive international exchange between Haider Ali, a Karachi-based truck artist, and Rory Coxhill, a Bedfordshire-based vardo artist. They combined work with young people, international collaboration in Pakistan, engagement with local Asian communities, and links to the rural and industrial heritage of the borough. They have also enabled the museum to add to its transport collection.

For *Truck Art*, the museum sourced a Bedford truck. Bedford trucks were produced in Luton by Vauxhall Motors, and many were exported around the world. In Pakistan, these trucks are still in regular use, often lavishly decorated. As part of the project, six young people went on a residential trip to Lahore and

Karachi in Pakistan. The intensive programme of activities included visits to truck yards, workshops at the National College of Art, tours of significant heritage sites, and collecting of objects to bring back to be accessioned into the collection. In Luton, young people worked with Haider Ali and Rory Coxhill to decorate the Bedford truck and the exterior and interior of a vardo, a horse drawn wagon traditionally used by British Romany travellers. Both vehicles are now a permanent part of the museum's collection. The exhibition was selected for the London 2012 Festival.

The young people also curated *Around the World in Eighty Objects*, an exhibition of objects they had selected from the museums' collections, and developed their own project, *Boater Barter*, in which they swapped traditional English boater hats, manufactured in Luton, for traditional headwear from other countries, through exchanges with their Olympic and Paralympic committees. These hats are now part of the Museums Luton collection.

Truck Art involved Luton Museums in the development of a number of new international partnerships. In the UK, staff worked closely with the British Council and the High Commission for Pakistan, with

the support of the British Museum, which facilitated introductions to useful contacts. The High Commission sees projects which highlight the strong artistic and cultural heritage of Pakistan as an effective way to promote Pakistan internationally. In Pakistan, with the support of the British Museum, the British Council and the High Commission, staff developed a working relationship with the National College of Art in Lahore, Lahore Museum, and a number of other small arts, heritage and youth organisations. Building these relationships was not an easy process, although the positioning of the project within the Cultural Olympiad was felt to be helpful in this respect as it gave the project credibility with international partners who were not familiar with Luton Museums.

The residential element of the project was a challenge for museum staff. Staff visited Pakistan on a four-day research trip in order to assess the viability of the young people visiting the country, particularly whether they could ensure their safety. There were considerable risks involved in taking a group of young people to Pakistan, unlike those likely to be encountered in more mainstream destinations, and significant cultural differences between museums in the UK and counterpart organisations in Lahore.

Curatorial practice is more traditional in Pakistan, and partners in Lahore initially did not understand why a British museum would be interested in truck decoration as an art form, and were being introduced for the first time to concepts of volunteering and community engagement.

Following the residential, and the completion of the design and decoration element of the project, the museum has displayed the truck and vardo on gallery. A decision has been made not to accession them into the collections, to allow more flexibility in their usage. So far, the truck has been parked outside the British Council's offices in London, and the vehicles have been displayed at a number of community events in the local area. They have been seen by many people beyond the museum's core audience. The project has demonstrated the value of international collaboration to many different aspects of museum practice. As a result of the project, international partnerships are continuing to take shape, and the museum has a network of international contacts which will be a platform for future collaborations. Museums Luton is currently advising the Mansaball Lake Rural Museum project in Shringar, Kashmir.

Closer to home, *Stories of the World* has had an impact on the way the museum operates. The international dimension to the project, and particularly the opportunity to travel to Pakistan, was a significant draw for young people to participate in museum projects. The truck and vardo have raised the profile of cultural organisations in Luton and created a sustainable platform for future community engagement activity. The project has received significant local press coverage, including features in Asian community media. Strategically, Museums Luton's support from local funders and stakeholders will increasingly rely on its ability to demonstrate its relevance to the whole community, and the projects have shown how ambitious and international project work can have a strong local impact. Museums Luton have applied for funding to ACE which commits them as an organisation to developing all of their future projects through co-productions, not just with young people, but using the same methodology with Friends groups, local history societies and community organisations. There is an intention to create apprenticeships for young people as part of this new approach. The project's successful innovations in contemporary collecting have also led to new thinking about what to collect in future to represent the Luton story.

Project: Mind the Map

Museum: London Transport Museum

London Transport Museum (LTM) is a social history museum that tells the story of London through the growth of its transport system, and engages the public in thinking about the future development of the city. The museum attracts a varied audience of London residents and national and international tourists. However it does not attract an audience of young people from London in significant numbers, as a result of the travel cost into central London and the museum's entrance charge. Given that these conditions are unlikely to change, LTM's approach to the *Stories of the World* programme was to use this opportunity to work with young people to pilot approaches to co-curating and opening up access to the museum which could be appropriate to a much wider range of interest groups and communities. It was therefore considered from its earliest days to be a programme of organisational change.

Prior to *Stories of the World*, London Transport Museum had run occasional projects with young people, and had an ongoing community programme funded by Renaissance in the Regions, but this was piecemeal

and outside the museum's core activities. In order to embed the work, they designed a project structure which brought young people into the museum as advisors and paid them generous expenses for their time. An initial team of four young consultants was recruited through a structured activity day at the museum, which had been advertised widely through Connexions and in local colleges. Young people were recruited on the basis of their potential to contribute to the project, and according to how much staff felt they would be able to benefit from their involvement. The intention was not to offer opportunities to young people with ambitions to develop a career in the sector.

These consultants then worked with LTM to develop a range of projects. For example, the young consultants devised and delivered family workshops for visitors. For 2012, a team of young people including the young consultants and a wider group of volunteers worked closely with staff to develop *Mind the Map*, a temporary exhibition which showed maps from the museum's extensive collection alongside newly commissioned maps by contemporary artists. Young people were extensively involved as the co-curators of the exhibition, researching and choosing maps for display, and designing interpretation and

interactives. They were also involved in designing marketing and working with the commissioned artists.

Kway was one of the original team of young consultants. She worked on an interactive to capture people's memories and feelings about the London Underground and link them to tube stations on a map. At the *Mind the Map* private view, she performed a spoken word performance with other young people, in front of a large audience. For Kway, who is currently at college on a vocational business course, participation in *Stories of the World* has been a hugely positive experience, helping her to develop confidence and learn about how to behave in a working environment with adults. The project has also encouraged her to follow up an emerging interest in engineering as a future career path. Through LTM's close links to Transport for London, Kway is now being mentored by their Head of Development and has completed two engineering related work placements. She says that 'being at the museum opens doors'. Alongside her college course, Kway is continuing her involvement at the museum, working on a project to build partnerships between LTM and youth organisations in West London.

Kway feels that working with the museum has been of great value to her fellow young consultants, who have been able to access useful and interesting opportunities despite having a wide range of interests and future ambitions which at first glance don't seem to relate directly to museums. Everyone had something to add.

Since the start of the project, twelve consultants have been recruited by LTM, and over 400 young people have been engaged in the project as participants and volunteers. The project was delivered strategically in order to maximise the chance of its becoming embedded practice, both in terms of ensuring that participation was attractive and of value to young people, and ensuring that it was valued by the museum. The key ways in which this was done were:

- The suggestions of young consultants were acted on quickly. Kway described her surprise at returning to the museum for the first time after her recruitment day, when she found out that her group's suggested improvements to the lighting of a bus on display had already been implemented. This helped get relations between young people and the museum off to a positive start.
- Staff in the learning team were aware of the need to support colleagues and young people

unused to working in this way; they brokered initial meetings and carefully facilitated activities until everyone felt comfortable.

- Young people worked on projects of strategic significance to the museum, particularly temporary exhibitions and family programmes. The Stories of the World projects were well resourced, which meant that they could be positioned prominently within the museum because the funding allowed for high quality production values.
- Young people worked with curators and got to know the collections, while curatorial staff who were used to teaching had to work with young people in a new, collaborative way, and allow young people to decide on themes and content.
- Mind the Map was experimental in its presentation and content. For example it was LTM's first experience of engaging with contemporary artists.

Within LTM, participatory projects now have a higher profile. *Stories of the World* is considered a success, and this has led the board and management team to consider how to take this learning forward to create sustainable organisational change. The board has requested a strategy for young people, which is in development. The learning team has been restructured to create a dedicated

management post for schools and young people. Discussions are ongoing about whether this method of collaborative curating could be extended to other audiences and communities.

LTM is now offering a range of opportunities for young people, structured to support their progression. There will be a range of volunteering roles for young people to support the museum's activities. Some of these volunteers may eventually go on to join the young consultants group. The existing team of young consultants are now being renamed 'young advisers', and will lead on developing new projects and partnerships. They will be peer mentors for the new young consultants. The museum is exploring how new participants' contributions could be accredited through Arts Award. They are also planning to recruit apprentices to develop programming for young people within the museum, and work with the young volunteers. The focus of their activities will shift in comparison to previous interns, as they will be valued for the specific contribution they can make as young people, rather than simply utilised as junior members of staff.

Research credits

Kate Rodenhurst is a Research Associate of the Institute of Cultural Capital.

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