



RENAISSANCE
NORTH WEST



MLA North West, MLA and Renaissance North West

Review of Museum, Library and Archive
Activity with Children and Young People

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In December 2005, the Burns Owens Partnership (BOP) was contracted to undertake a review of museum, library and archive activity with children and young People, by MLA North West, MLA and Renaissance North West.

The literature review sets out the main strengths, weaknesses and gaps in the evidence base against current policy for children and young people, and offers a series of recommendations on how the evidence base might be improved. The report also identifies a need for the sector to engage more fully with the main service providers for children and young people, in terms of establishing better contacts, relationships and partnerships. It is only through a combination of improving both evidence and engagement that the sector will be in a position to help *shape* policy regarding children and young people.

The report makes recommendations on how to improve engagement with other public sector partners, particularly within the North West region. The first step of this process is to understand and clarify what the 'offer' is that museums, libraries and archives can make towards some of the most commonly defined goals within children and young people's policy. The report develops a model of the offer and maps this in relation to children and young people's policy.

Policy context for children and young people

The policy environment related to children and young people in England is currently going through the biggest change in a generation. At the heart of this is the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework and allied Youth Matters (YM) agenda.

- ECM focuses on five key outcomes for children and young people: Be Healthy; Stay Safe; Enjoy and Achieve; Make a Positive Contribution; and Achieve Economic Well Being.
- In essence it is an outcome-based planning and evaluation framework for use by a range of partners to ensure co-ordination and integration of their service planning processes.
- Youth Matters differs in that it does contain new national policy proposals for young people; namely to provide 'something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to'.
- However, the YM programme will still be assessed within the five outcomes framework of ECM, and this reflects the wider adoption of the framework across government to measure outcomes for children and young people in, for example, Local Area Agreements (LAAs).
- ECM and YM will be delivered by Children's Trusts, multi-agency bodies consisting of a range of core (statutory) and wider (discretionary) partners, which offer a significant degree of local autonomy.

- In addition to the cross-departmental ECM agenda, there are a number of DfES-specific policies which have an immediate relevance for the activities that museums, libraries and archives engage in with children and young people, principally: SureStart, Family Learning, and Extended Schools.
- ECM and the relevant DfES policies exemplify the trend towards increasing multi-agency working in improving public services and tackling disadvantage. This trend represents both an **opportunity** and a **threat** for museums, libraries and archives.
- The opportunity arises from the fact that new forms of local governance relevant to children and young people's policy require local authorities to actively involve a range of partners. This relates specifically to Children's Trusts, but also to more generic processes such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).
- Local authorities have a degree of flexibility and autonomy in choosing who to involve in the partnership process and how outcomes are delivered. In theory, this is an opportunity for the contribution of museums, libraries and archives' to a range of social agendas to be recognised and integrated with a number of policy structures and processes – at the local level.
- The threat arises from the fact that, in practice, the museum, library and archive sector to date has often found it difficult to participate in these structures and processes at the local level. Equally, the museum, library and archive domains (and culture more generally) have had little say in the development of these overarching processes and frameworks at a central government level.
- In summary, despite the increasing emphasis on multi-agency working within government, at present cultural sector bodies too often seem not to register on the partnership 'radar' of other service providers.
- Improving relationships and partnership working with other service providers is therefore crucial in gaining greater credit, profile and influence within policy making for children and young people.

National literature review

The literature review is a narrative literature review, designed to inform policy, provide evidence where possible to support advocacy material, and identify major gaps in the existing literature. The type of literature consulted includes consultancy reports, project evaluations and 'grey literature', in addition to academic literature from a range of specialist research centres and relevant journal publications.

In addition to the consultants' knowledge of the literature, interviewees that were consulted during the research were asked to provide references to key material. These were particularly helpful in tracking down international and regional studies, though there are important policy differences between the UK and other countries, which mean that the review concentrates on UK material.

The literature was reviewed against the five ECM outcomes and the wider policy landscape for children and young people. The review finds that it is easier to make a case for how the sector makes an *holistic* contribution to improving the life chances of children and young people, rather than against the five separate ECM outcomes. For this reason, the literature review does not consider evidence directly against the ECM indicators or 'legislative judgments' that sit beneath the five outcomes within the hierarchy of the ECM framework.

Overall, the evidence base in relation to ECM is strongest when it demonstrates the immediate effects of children and young people's interaction with the sector, principally in terms of enjoyment and learning outcomes – particularly of life skills/non-cognitive skills, but also related specifically to literacy.

ECM: Enjoy and Achieve

The evidence of the impact of museum, library and archive activities with children and young people is strongest for this ECM outcome.

- There is strong evidence from the literature that museums, libraries and archives are viewed as enjoyable **recreational** activities by both children and young people, and by intermediaries such as teachers or parents.
- As well as its intrinsic importance, a range of research studies have established positive links between enjoyment, learning and academic success.
- In addition to enjoyment, teachers in the National/Regional Museums Partnerships Programme also report that interaction with museums, libraries and archives can help to deliver **curriculum-based outcomes** (which form many of the 'Enjoy and Achieve' outcome indicators). This is echoed by pupils from the same study that report that they may get improved marks from having engaged in work with museums, libraries and archives.
- However, aside from individuals' perceptions of change, the literature does not show that engagement with museums, libraries and archives has a positive effect on academic attainment as measured through formal assessment.
- In part, this is due to a general lack of longitudinal research in this area, which means that it cannot be demonstrated either positively or negatively.
- Where longitudinal work does exist in this area it is in relation to early years work in public libraries through the Bookstart evaluation, which is considered below.

ECM: Make a Positive Contribution

- This ECM outcome covers a range of quite specific and 'directed' activities – i.e. activities that focus on encouraging young people to get involved in activities that result in 'positive' social and economic externalities (volunteering, becoming an entrepreneur), while avoiding those with negative social and economic externalities (crime).
- Thus evidence related to taking part in more general cultural/social activities, that are less 'directed' than these specific activities and behaviours, falls under the 'Enjoy and Achieve' outcome instead.
- Relatedly, there appears to be little national research that looks at the impact of a range of activities that museums, libraries and archives provide that could be considered under this category of 'positive activities' (e.g. volunteering, crime reduction etc).
- However, evaluation of Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP), a cross-departmental national programme run by the DfES in which public libraries are involved, does suggest that **participation** in the programme of 'developmental and diversionary activities' has had positive impacts on learning and some aspects of social capital formation.

ECM: Be Healthy

- There is only the beginnings of an evidence base relating to the contribution that museums, libraries and archives make to health and wellbeing, and children and young people are not well represented within even this small body of literature.
- In part, this absence seems to stem from the fact that research on most activities for children and young people within the sector starts from an educational/learning perspective.
- Therefore even in instances where there might be evidence of positive health outcomes, for instance in libraries' early years work, researchers choose instead to focus on learning outcomes (in this case, language acquisition and literacy).
- This means that at present it is only really possible to infer health outcomes on this evidence (e.g. there is evidence that improved cognitive skills, such as literacy, are key to mental and emotional health).

ECM: Achieve Economic Well Being

Evidence that relates to museums, libraries and archives contribution to learning and skills development is relevant to this ECM outcome, given its strong focus on educational progression and employability.

- There is little evidence on the *direct* link between skills acquired by young people's interaction with museums, libraries and archives and economic outcomes.
- In part, this is simply a factor of time, in that it is difficult to track how effects on children and young people translate into economic outcomes in the labour market in later life.
- But there are also difficulties that are more specific to the sector, principally that economic outcomes, such as business start-ups or even educational progression, are likely to be externalities of museums, libraries and archives activities, rather than the original intention and purpose.
- However, in relation to positive economic externalities, recent research is suggestive of an important link between the kinds of **non-cognitive or 'life' skills** that often arise from activities in museums, libraries and archives, and their value in the labour market.
- Research from the US National Bureau of Economic Research argues that too much emphasis has been placed on academic or cognitive skills as employers value attitudinal traits, such as dependability and stability, as much as or more than cognitive skills, and that these traits may be more important in determining personal success in the long term.

ECM: Stay Safe

Of all the ECM outcomes, 'Stay Safe' is the outcome that most reflects the roots of the 'change for children' programme in services for vulnerable children and young people.

- Stay safe is thus concerned with statutory duties for ensuring that services for children and young people (principally care services and schools) prevent harm to children and young people.
- It is therefore fundamentally not about influencing the attitudes and behaviour of children and young people themselves to 'Stay Safe' (these fall under 'Make a Positive Contribution') and as such, there is very little that the museums, libraries and archives sector can contribute to this ECM outcome, other than that they have a duty to be safe places for children and young people.

Youth Matters

- Museums, libraries and archives often find it challenging to attract and engage with young people, and the literature reflects this in terms of a lack of real evidence of impact with this age group.
- But there is increasing evidence of practice of working with young people in the sector, including a number of national programmes specifically designed to improve engagement with this age group.
- There is a strong overlap between evidence that would be covered under Youth Matters and also under the 'Make a Positive Contribution' ECM outcome, as Youth Matters is principally concerned with providing 'developmental and diversionary activities' for young people.
- A range of recent initiatives has been established to try and improve museums, libraries and archives' engagement with, and services for, young people.
- These initiatives require the sector to adopt a significantly different approach to that taken when working with younger children, and outreach work and partnership with other agencies are seen by many as the key to working with this age group.

DfES: Early Years And Family Learning

There is a large body of literature that attests to the importance of early intervention in education to combat social exclusion.

- Strong research evidence shows that pre-school language and literacy experiences are accurate predictors of later educational attainment.
- Public libraries have developed a near universal offer of pre-school **language and literacy** activities, based around the Bookstart book-giving programme and participatory activities for toddlers and their parents and carers, such as singing nursery rhymes (Rhyme Time) and reading stories (Storytime).
- A longitudinal study of Bookstart has shown that on both teacher assessment measures and pupil test results, children that had benefited from Bookstart did better than the control group.
- The distinction is most pronounced in English, but it was also found in other subjects, leading the researchers to hypothesise that it is the attention and concentration that the child learns that is the key skill as this is a crucial element of **learning the ability to learn**.
- Similar findings that reinforce the link between museums, libraries and archives activities and improvements in educational indicators within pre-school children have also been found in evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnerships (PEEPs).
- Other than early intervention, the strongest predictor of literacy and language development is the support provided in the home by parents and carers. This is because the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents affects children, particular in early years.

- This has led to a raft of government and government-backed policies on 'family learning', and the sector is involved in delivering many of these, though as yet there is little research on the specific contribution that museums, libraries and archives can make in these settings.

DfES: Extended Schools and Study Support

Extended Schools is a developing policy area within the UK and one in which museums, libraries and archives are likely to play an important role. However, its newness means that there is little outcome-based research on Extended Schools. However, Study Support, which is one of the key elements within the Extended Schools concept, has been the subject of more research.

In particular, a large-scale research study originally undertaken by the Quality in Education Centre at the University of Strathclyde for the DfEE concluded that out-of-hours school learning, including cultural activities, could have significant and substantial effects on academic achievements, even where the activities (such as sport or arts) were not directly curriculum-related.

- Also, research has been conducted internationally on extra-curricular activities in museums, libraries and archives, much of which is relevant to the concept of Extended Schools.
- Research has focused on the effect of these extra curricular activities on educational attainment. Some studies report that involvement in specifically cultural extra curricular activities is paramount in raising attainment, but these findings are contested by other researchers.
- Others conclude that the use of external resources (such as museums, libraries and archives) in out-of-hours settings is most important in disadvantaged areas, as they can bridge the gap in achievement related to differences in the home environment.

Limitations and gaps in the evidence base nationally

Despite the growing volume of literature on the social and educational impact of museums, libraries and archives, serious limitations and gaps in the evidence base remain. In particular:

- very little longitudinal work
- a lack of baselines against which to measure change
- very few studies make use of control groups
- little research that analyses in detail the specific nature of the learning that takes place in museums, libraries and archives contexts
- little work within museum education research on learning through participation in programmes, workshops or via websites, compared with museum visits

- there appears at times to be a discrepancy between children and young people's stated intentions or impressions and their behaviours, which is unexplored in the research
- there is little research evidence that provides an understanding of the degree of participation that is required to produce demonstrable effects, beyond the observation that it is generally associated with habitual or prolonged use.

Conclusions and recommendations

The emphasis on partnership working and holistic service delivery in ECM and YM means that there is a major opportunity for museums, libraries and archives to become involved in developing integrated service provision for one of their major constituencies: children and young people.

This is an opportunity that needs to be grasped by museums, libraries and archives. Articulating (and improving) the evidence base regarding museums, libraries and archives' activities for children and young people is a key part of realising this opportunity.

Improving the evidence base

There are a number of ways in which the MLA – as the sector lead body – can act at national and regional level to address some of the shortcomings and limitations of the evidence base.

- **At local/regional level.** The Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) have added most value to practitioners' and institutions' work where they were supported by regional agencies and/or through peer learning. MLA's subsequent idea to facilitate regional 'learning circles' to support further use of the GLOs could provide the kind of forum through which improved practice and skills for undertaking more general research and evaluation could be delivered.
- **At national level.** MLA has a specific remit here to develop evidence of the impact or outcomes of activities within museums, libraries and archives. There are a number of ways in which this could be undertaken in relation to children and young people.
 - **Museums, libraries and archives' sector development programmes** such as Renaissance in the Regions and Framework for the Future are national in scope, longitudinal in duration and have some discretionary expenditure. This means that within the sector, they are the best place from which the more fundamental research and evaluation that is required to demonstrate the outcomes of the sector can be resourced and overseen.
 - **Working with partners outside the sector.** MLA should investigate the possibilities for joint working with partners from outside the museums, libraries and archives sector to address the need for more fundamental and longer term research. In particular, this should involve the UK's higher education community.

Both of these recommendations could apply as across the board recommendations for MLA in terms of its overall role in improving the evidence base for the sector. Specific recommendations for priority areas for children and young people that emerge from the present review include the following:

- **Early years.** The Bookstart evaluation shows the positive impact of the programme on both cognitive and non-cognitive skill development in early years. However, there are some limitations to the existing research and other components of public libraries' early years work that have not been researched at all, despite having become close to a universal offer provided by libraries. There are therefore a range of possible research and evaluation options that MLA should consider commissioning to more thoroughly demonstrate the positive contribution that the sector makes to pre-school language, literacy and health.
- **Family learning.** The role of museums, libraries and archives in family learning is under researched. In particular, the sector needs to identify what are the distinctive benefits that museums, libraries and archives can offer as resources for family learning programmes.
- **Curriculum support.** There are gaps in the evidence base related to both the scale and scope of service provision in this area, as well as the impact that these activities have on longer term educational attainment.
- **Recreation and participation.** Museums, libraries and archives provide enjoyable experiences for children and young people – though too often, immediate expressions of enjoyment do not translate into repeat visits/participation. Also, the weight of evidence in this area currently relates more strongly to children than young people. But it is specifically in relation to providing 'places to go' and 'things to do' for young people that the sector will have to evidence its potential contribution to Youth Matters in the immediate future.

Similarly, there is a gap in the evidence base regarding the role of young people's volunteering in the sector, and how young people are involved in the design of museum, library and archive services. In short, MLA needs to consider how it can best position the sector across the board in relation to the recently announced Youth Matters proposals, including what this means for improving the evidence base.

- **Non-cognitive skills.** The evidence related to museums, libraries and archives' activities for children and young people often refers to the development of what are variously termed 'emotional and social development', 'non-cognitive skills', 'emotional intelligence', 'social learning', 'self confidence' and 'life skills'. If these attributes are pivotal to understanding how the intrinsic benefits that museums, libraries and archives provide for children and young people relate to extrinsic benefits, then the sector would be better served by a more common vocabulary and/or a clearer understanding of the distinctions between one term and another, and how each of these facets of human capital map onto a number of distinct extrinsic benefits (e.g. employability or better mental health).

Improving engagement with local and regional partners

The move towards multi-agency working that is exemplified in the ECM programme and a number of current DfES policies means that there is a major opportunity for the museum, library and archive sector to become more involved in joint working for delivering services and activities for children and young people.

This engagement must be proactive, as it will not happen as a matter of due course. Museums, libraries and archives are not core partners within Children's Trusts, have no legislative duties with regard to children and young people, and are therefore not automatically present within the regime of inspection and performance management developed for ECM.

Museums, libraries and archives also need to be realistic about this engagement. The ECM/YM agenda is led by the main providers of services such as schools and the health service, as well as the agencies that deal with vulnerable young people, such as criminal justice and social care. Cultural agencies have a particular offer to make here; but they should not attempt to address the whole ECM agenda.

The Offer

The 'offer' developed in this report focuses on where museums, libraries and archives' particular strengths lie. The components of the offer are:

1. Language acquisition and the ability to learn
2. Literacy development
3. Curriculum support
4. Recreation
5. Participation
6. Non-cognitive skills development
7. Personalised learning provision

These elements contribute to the wider objectives of policy for children and young people at local, regional and national level. The offer is intended to help the sector distil and articulate the range of activities and the kinds of outcomes that it can offer for children and young people, in a language – and with reference to a policy environment – that other public sector partners can identify with. The overall goal of this study is to review the evidence with a view to helping to support museums, libraries and archives to engage with other partners, and to ensure that the sector achieves the prominence it deserves within the changing landscape of children's and young people's services.

While policy for children and young people is set centrally, however, it is important to note that its implementation varies at both the local and regional level. The full research report which follows illustrates how this operates within one region, the North West. It then makes recommendations for how MLA North West together with other sector partners, such as Renaissance North West and Arts Council North West, can improve their joint working within this specific, North West policy

context. Replicating this work in another region would require a similar process of detailed organisational/policy mapping and engagement to be undertaken.