

Slide 1 Me

Thanks very much to Joan and colleagues for invitation to speak

- Sharon Heal, **director Museums Association UK**
<https://www.museumsassociation.org>
- **Chair of the Museum of Homelessness** left image covid taskforce – pivoted to direct delivery as well as led successful campaign – Everyone In - which led to hotels being opened to people who were homeless for the duration of the pandemic
<https://museumofhomelessness.org>
- also a **trustee of the Thackray Museum of Medicine** medium size museum north England <https://thackraymuseum.co.uk>
- and the **European Museums Forum (EMYA)** which gives me some insight into European museum practice <https://europeanforum.museum>

Right images couple of publications which I have contributed chapters to + podcast

Slide 2 MA

What is the MA what do we do

founded 1889 by a small group of museum professionals - the **world's first museums association** aim was to foster mutual cooperation among curators and institutions.

- inaugural meeting was held at the [Yorkshire Philosophical Society](#) in York on 20 June 1889.
- 1890 first conference
- MJ first published 1901 (& has been in continuous publication since then)

Today we have **1500** Institutional members and **12,000** individual members

Deliver campaigns, programmes, workforce development, best practice, support & funding

Slide 3 IWM

History MA tied to **history of sector in UK** – trace development of new practice through conference papers and MJ and archive

Image: Second WW bomb damage Imperial War Museum

Quote **Dr F S Wallis, director of Bristol City Museum & honorary editor of Museums Journal in 1945**

*“In the midst of the darkness and brutality of war, museums and art galleries have seized all the available opportunities for spreading the light of learning and culture. Their amazing development during the past 20 years has been tremendously **accelerated not retarded as was first anticipated by war conditions.**”*

From book **Museums in the Second World War: Catherine Pearson**

Made me think: Covid only other time in history sector most if not all museums closed - Covid revealed the **contradictions between how we might see ourselves and our usefulness vs how society and politicians see and value us.**

Eg in Covid in France some museums allowed to reopen because they were deemed so **small** and with **few enough visitors** to make **risk negligible**

Dominique Poulot, provides an insightful critique of French government decisions that resulted in smaller, less visited local museums in the regions opening sooner than the larger, busier metropolitan museums.

His argument is this exposes these museums as **nonessential “storage facilities”**

By contrast in Netherlands (and UK and other countries) – museums not allowed to reopen as **deemed non-essential services** – whilst eg gyms and hairdressers were

No matter what we might think or know about health and wellbeing advantages of museum visitation, **policy make and decision makers at time of crisis didn’t agree**

Slide 4 funding context

Current context UK museums - many museum leaders have said we are facing an **existential crisis** but what does that actually mean?

A crisis of existence (yes in some cases some museums might not continue to exist anymore) **OR a crisis of meaning/purpose** – probably both but outcome funding crisis is that it directly impacts ability to do focussed or targeted work with communities

Funding – civic museums - financial model not viable or sustainable without public funding but have to deliver public benefit

Keeping the doors open vs being the type of museum that society needs and wants for all

Financial environment UK and long tail of covid also means that people under more pressure than ever - they need support to sustain their health and wellbeing at exactly same time that there’s pressure on local authorities, health and community services and culture, museums and galleries and they are facing cuts to their services

Slide 5 members survey

What does that mean for museums? MA members survey 2024

- Increase in number of museums planning cuts
- Significant increases in those reporting reductions in public programming and learning and engagement ie the type of work traditionally been done around health and wellbeing & targeted interventions

Slide 6 survey

See that evidenced here

63% respondents planning cuts to public programming cw 50% in previous year

Slide 7 survey

Also ask other questions - in particular does the museum you work for or with proactively have programmes for enhancing health and wellbeing

Remains consistently high

Slide 8 research

As Mark mentioned there's lots of evidence for H&W benefits of **simply visiting museums and galleries** –

Population-wide demographically representative studies that show attendance can **improve mental and physical health** and can impact how long and well we live

Last 25 years in particular epidemiological research on the health impact of 'general cultural attendance'.

This research began in Sweden in the mid-1990s, and findings have been confirmed and area has been further researched and developed

One most recent studies Daisy Fancourt **The Impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health: Findings from Major Cohort Studies in the UK and USA 2017 – 2022**. London: UCL; 2023 March.

<https://www.artsandhealth.ie/research-evaluation/the-impact-of-arts-and-cultural-engagement-on-population-health/>

Researchers looked at existing evidence found came from relatively small-scale intervention studies conducted at fixed time points and of bespoke arts programmes, with specific clinical aims focused on narrow samples with short-term follow-ups - **what was lacking was longitudinal research on whether engagement in the arts had long-term health benefits**

UCL research aimed to **fill the research gap** using data from **representative cohort studies** tracking thousands of randomly sampled individuals from a population over decades

Looked at cohort studies - which are the bedrock of research in many scientific disciplines - they provide rich data on demographics, behaviours, finances, attitudes and opinions, and health and lots of these studies have questions on arts and cultural engagement and so provide opportunity to explore the relationship between arts and health across peoples lives.

Slide 9 research

Lots of evidence in report for the role that arts and cultural engagement can play in protecting and improving health

Older adults in England (age 50+) who regularly participate in cultural activities:

- have nearly half the risk of developing depression
- more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing
- a lower risk of loneliness
- less chance of developing chronic pain
- less likelihood of becoming frail
- less likelihood developing [dementia](#)
- or having poorer [cognitive functioning](#).

Also found that arts and cultural engagement can have long-lasting effects from childhood to adolescence.

- Specifically, children aged seven who take part in creative activities have a lower risk of developing behavioural problems
- Adolescents also benefit and are less likely to be antisocial and are more likely to have better self-control.

Slide 10 MCL

What's the Museums Association's skin in the game?

Museums Changes Lives is our flagship campaign

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/>

History MCL – first created 2014 to demonstrate how museums of all sizes and collections are positively impacting people and communities and makes the case for further evaluation, research, development and funding for this work.

Rooted in research that Mark compiled looking at health benefits of engagement with culture - we wanted support museums to make a difference

Slide 11 themes

Call to arms – museums can make a positive difference and three themes:

- Enhance health and wellbeing
- Create better places for us all to live and work
- Create space for debate, discussion and reflection

Slide 12 survey

Going back to members survey MCL usage is second only to Code of Ethics 67% cw 62% in previous year

Slide 13 toolkits

As work in this field has grown so toolkits, guidelines and frameworks have developed although most focussed on what do at an institutional level basis - Measuring socially engaged practice and other resources available on MA website

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/measuring-socially-engaged-practice/>

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/power-to-the-people/>

Slide 14 MA funding

We as MA have promoted and supported this work through **advocacy, professional development, guidance and funding**

Mark referenced failure of small-scale project audience development schemes and inclusivity schemes - agree **project funding is problematic** – what happens at the end?

Damaging for communities to be dropped and discarded and often projects not scalable

BUT... we fund work in this area - what are we trying to do that's different?

EFCCF dual focus on **collections** and **inclusion**. We award the fund on behalf of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and have awarded over **£14m** in nearly **200** grants since 2011. We now offer core grants to museum for strategic development of their inclusive collections work; and partnership project grants for museums and community organisations working equitably with collections to achieve shared aims for inclusion. Aim with both is to **EMBED** as way of working

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/funding/efccf/>

H&W in Museums fund - **£1.5m over two years** to fund developmental work. In this area and to **improve, extend, embed and create legacy**

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/funding/health-and-wellbeing/>

Relationship building – inc social prescribing which links museums to health service providers and museum trips are prescribed – builds 1_1 relationships - needs more evidence and needs long-term strategic funding

Slide 15 crannog centre

<https://crannog.co.uk>

But if general attendance can improve H&W **why are we sweating small stuff – why not just get more different people across threshold?**

Argue that some of that **small stuff matters and can lead to bigger changes** eg changes how museums are perceived and how museum itself operates

Image - **The Scottish Crannog Centre - Engaging Vulnerable Women and Families in Perthshire with Prehistoric Pottery Collections**

Delivered a series of community engagement activities to vulnerable women and families inspired by the collections, and co-curated displays with them

At Crannog Centre **striving to embed this as a way of working** and for project to have a legacy ie how approach and welcome vulnerable and excluded groups based on understanding how museums can support psychological wellbeing

In terms of research evidence for example Dragija and Jelincic conducted research on whether museums can **increase the visitor's psychological wellbeing** and how the museum experience can be designed to enhance the psychological wellbeing

The results showed that museums can enhance psychological wellbeing. by designing museum experiences that are attractive, comfortable,, comprehensible, participative, innovative, and sustainable,

I think these approaches can be tested through smaller interventions

Slide 16 colston

<https://exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/the-colston-statue/>

However - **museums don't provide health and wellbeing benefits for all** - and might have opposite effect for some – orgs such as Culture& and Museum Detox have explored what impact displays of empire and also the overall western tradition of museums might have on wellbeing of global majority communities and staff members - need **more research and evidence** how this impacts and how to mitigate

Image left empty Colson plinth Bristol (slave trader and plantation owner), image right the statue on display Bristol museums - displayed part of consultation with local population asking what they wanted to see happen with statue

Slide 17 decol

We produced guidance for sector re decolonisation - recognises that some collections, displays, objects might trigger trauma in certain groups

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/supporting-decolonisation-in-museums/> One of the 10 principles of this work outlined in the guidance is:

Take care - Care for yourself and all those who are part of this work – inc communities and museum workers

Timothy P. Brown argued that in collections empire for example objects can be marked by 'a traumatic rupture', and the displacement and dissociation of having been 'violently transplanted from one context to another' has the potential to re-wound the communities that cohere around the museum. (Brown, T. P. (2004). Trauma, museums and the future of pedagogy. Third Text, 18(4). 247–259.)

Brown also argues that trauma is not just a condition that is specific to certain groups; trauma characterises life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Some museums UK inc Museum of Homelessness adopting **trauma-informed approach** to work with marginalised communities - (a way of working with people who

have experienced trauma that involves being aware of the impact of trauma, and taking steps to prevent re-traumatization)

Slide 18 MAG

End on case for project interventions

Image **Manchester Art Gallery** - families of the world with a multi-agency approach, to provide creative activities for families arriving in Manchester from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Eritrea and Sudan.

<https://manchesterartgallery.org/families-of-the-world/>

The families staying in a local hotel, particularly mothers and young children, participate in weekly art-based and artist-led sessions at the gallery, ending with a shared meal.

These projects benefit the individuals involved and play a crucial role in helping institutions like museums to understand the needs and interests of target groups, especially excluded or vulnerable people who might experience social and psychological barriers to visiting traditional museums and similar cultural institutions

I can see how projects like this impact general ethos and atmosphere of museum - wander through galleries range of co-production, artist interventions, issues based work, new approaches to display and experimentation

- Room to Breathe is a dedicated space to help you experience art in a more mindful way.
- Exhibition rethinking the grand tour
- Temp exhibition climate justice
- What is Manchester Art Gallery and what does it mean to you? Every Object and Person has stories to tell.

Conclusion - shouldn't be either address benefit gap OR do short term interventions - possible both and that short term interventions can lead to org culture where long term change is sought and possible.