

# How museums, libraries and archives contribute to lifelong learning

IFLL Sector Paper 10



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**promoting adult learning**

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NIACE has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

You can find NIACE online at [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

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## Foreword

This is the tenth of the Sector Papers to be published from the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL). The Sector Papers will discuss the implications of lifelong learning for each of the sectors involved in providing learning opportunities: early childhood, schools, family learning, further education, higher education, private training providers, voluntary and community organisations, local authorities, learning cities, cultural organisations, and local learning ecologies. The goal here is to encourage innovative thinking on how these parts do or do not fit together, as part of a systemic approach to lifelong learning.

The Inquiry was established in September 2007 and produced its main report in September 2009. It is sponsored by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), with an independent Board of Commissioners under the chairmanship of Sir David Watson. Full details of the Inquiry can be found at [www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk](http://www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk)

The overall goal of the Inquiry is to offer an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK. This involves:

- articulating a broad rationale for public and private investment in lifelong learning;
- a re-appraisal of the social and cultural value attached to it by policy-makers and the public;
- developing new perspectives on policy and practice.

## IFLL: supplementary papers

The Sector Papers are complemented by several other strands of IFLL work:

- *Thematic Papers*. These relate to nine broad themes, such as demography, technology or migration, to lifelong learning. Each one reviews evidence submitted to the Inquiry, and then draws together strands from the debate into a synthesis of the issues, with key messages.  
(See [www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Thematic-Papers.htm](http://www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Thematic-Papers.htm))

- *Context Papers*. These will provide a broad overall picture of expenditure on all forms of lifelong learning: by government, across all departments; by employers, public and private; by the third sector; and by individuals and households. The goal is to provide a benchmark for mapping future trends.  
(See [www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Further-Work-Papers.htm](http://www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Further-Work-Papers.htm))

- *Public Value Papers*. These will look, from different angles and using a variety of techniques, at the 'social productivity' of lifelong learning, i.e. what effects it has on areas such as health, civic activity or crime. The goal is both to provide evidence

on these effects, and to stimulate a broader debate on how such effects can be measured and analysed.

(See [www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Public-Value-Papers.htm](http://www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Public-Value-Papers.htm))

- *Learning Infrastructures*. Unlike the others, this strand consists not of a series of papers but a set of scenarios, designed to promote debate and imagination on what the infrastructure for learning might look like in the future. This challenges us to integrate the physical environments of learning, the virtual environments or learning technologies, and people's competences and behaviour.

(See [www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Further-Work-Papers.htm](http://www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk/Further-Work-Papers.htm))

Published papers are available from the IFLL website:

[www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk](http://www.lifelonglearninginquiry.org.uk)



Professor Tom Schuller  
Director, IFLL



Sir David Watson  
Chair, IFLL Commissioners

### **Pinning down the wow factor**

This IFLL paper sets out how museums, libraries and archives contribute to lifelong learning and calls for their collections, spaces and learning programmes to be integrated into a new joined-up framework that connects formal and informal learning providers. The paper also poses questions for museums, libraries and archives themselves – what more could they do to embrace the opportunities now available to work in partnership with others and support integration to happen?

The Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is the government's agency for museums, libraries and archives. Leading strategically, we promote best practice to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all. Visit [www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk) for more information.

## Introduction

Museums, libraries and archives play a vital role in encouraging everyone to carry on learning throughout their lives and make an important contribution to establishing healthier and happier communities. They are:

- inspiring local facilities that offer access to resources, services and skilled staff;
- engaging local spaces that a broad range of people feel comfortable and at home in;
- not viewed as formal learning environments and so can successfully re-engage people in learning both formally and informally;
- offering opportunities for individuals, groups and families to learn together throughout life and can play an intergenerational role that has significant wider community benefits – there is no hierarchy of learning here; adults and children naturally learn together and from each other; and
- places that not only support people to develop skills and knowledge but also lift people's spirits and build confidence.

*The Learning Revolution* White Paper, published in March 2009, calls for the establishment of an informal adult learning movement – joining up all the resources and partners that contribute to lifelong learning in a new powerful alliance that builds on each of the constituent parts.

Museums, libraries and archives have been undergoing their own revolution in the last decade. They have all widened participation in recent years and support not only educational progression but economic, social and personal progression too. New funding, partnerships and approaches have built their capacity to play an important role in an integrated lifelong learning framework. They offer wider community gains too – bringing people together, challenging thinking, encouraging civic participation and bridging gaps between generations.

Examples of this quiet revolution include an enhanced family learning offer from museums – the introduction of free admission to national and many regional museums has significantly increased use. Museums have responded positively by taking up the challenge presented by the Kids in Museums campaign. They are working with NIACE to improve family learning practice, ensuring that positive learning experiences are offered to adults as well as children when they are learning together as a family.

Libraries have also been transformed over the last decade and have now, perhaps, finally lost the tag of institutions that only reach the middle classes. The People's Network of 30,000 free or low-cost Internet-enabled PCs, available in every library, has given them a vital role in reducing digital exclusion. The reader development movement, led by the public library service, has not only supported individual readers to expand and extend their reading choices but has kick-started the reading group movement in this country. There are now over 50,000 active reading groups providing

opportunities for people to come together and share their enjoyment and experiences – a phenomenal growth that indicates the appetite for informal learning opportunities. Libraries have put their time, energy and expertise into supporting those who find reading more of a challenge, encouraging them to take their first steps towards reading for enjoyment through programmes such as the Vital Link and Six Book Challenge.

Archives, perhaps the best kept lifelong learning secret of all, are amazing treasure troves that contain the collective memory of the nation. They provide glimpses into the past that help to make sense of the present and the future. Archival material has enormous lifelong learning potential – it can motivate the most disengaged young person or adult with basic skills. The BBC series *Who Do You Think You Are?*, storytelling at its very best, demonstrates one way of opening up archives – fuelling an enormous interest in researching family histories – but much more could be done.

Storytelling is perhaps the common theme that runs through museums, libraries and archives; our sector offers access to real learning experiences that tell the story of the past, the present and the future.

## Four ways museums, libraries and archives could contribute to a new lifelong learning framework

Museums, libraries and archives recognise that learning is a core element of their service, often stating that 'learning is at the heart of all we do', but what is less clear is how we translate and promote this to the wider community and partners who could usefully integrate our resources into their learning programmes. As a sector we have sometimes sat back and waited for people to work out what these opportunities are for themselves. The new lifelong learning framework emerging from the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL) provides an opportunity for the sector to step forward and contribute positively to an integrated lifelong learning approach.

Here are four ideas of what museums, libraries and archives could do, or do more of, to support this approach and ensure more learning opportunities are available for more individuals, groups and families in their local communities.

### **1. Museums, libraries and archives could open up their spaces and resources in new ways to create more opportunities**

Museums, libraries and archives are (largely) publicly funded, based in local communities and open to everyone. They are ideally placed to support people to pursue learning throughout their lives. New approaches to making our spaces and resources available for others to access and use could dramatically increase the lifelong learning capacity of our sector, not only increasing participation, but improving learning outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

New approaches are emerging through the co-location of libraries with health services, children's centres and one-stop shops, for example, but The Learning Revolution requires a change in thinking from museums, libraries and archives on how they contribute to a thriving culture of lifelong learning. The learning activity that they deliver through their own staffing and programming budgets is an important element of their overall learning output, but does not have to be the full extent of it.

How can we free up our resources and spaces to allow greater activity to take place? We could build capacity beyond the structured lifelong learning activities we offer by allowing other people to use our spaces and resources in new ways. Could the enormous volunteer workforce in the sector be provided with new opportunities to share their enthusiasms and skills with others?

I see this as building a learning continuum across museums, libraries and archives. At one end is the highly valued and valuable contribution to learning made by the expert and knowledgeable curators, archivists and librarians employed by the sector. These are staff who are highly skilled in transferring knowledge, interpreting and cataloguing collections, researching and creating exhibitions, and managing and disseminating

information. Then there is the wide-ranging and diverse structured learning activities delivered by museums, libraries and archives that are highly popular and valued – the big blockbuster exhibitions; seminars; reading groups; support with researching family histories and so on.

But this needn't be the end of our contribution. The learning continuum could also include activity offered by other people in our spaces and using our resources – including third sector, health and self-organised learning partners – extending the capacity of museums, libraries and archives to offer lifelong learning opportunities to their communities. Consideration would, of course, need to be given to security and the care of collections, but there is undoubtedly more that could be done to innovate and open things up.

For example, the reading group model which began in public libraries has grown into a largely self-organised movement with 50,000 active reading groups. This could become a model adopted by museums and galleries, offering opportunities for people who have visited an exhibition or gallery to enter into similar debate and discussion about their experiences. Facilitated by museum and gallery staff to get it off the ground, this could similarly become a self-organised movement. An additional approach to the more traditional model we currently see in museums and galleries of an expert curator, or commentator, sharing their knowledge and expertise through a series of advertised talks.

Essex Library Service enables over 400 Booktalk reading groups to thrive by supporting a network of reader development 'champions' who help to set up groups and recruit new members across the county. Essex Library Service offers Booktalk groups extended book loans, meeting spaces and an online space to share their knowledge and book recommendations with the wider community.

Opening up space and resources in new ways may involve giving up some control – sharing our expertise with others to enable them to successfully use our resources and being prepared to consider and try new approaches to use space. We perhaps need to shift our thinking away from being gatekeepers to being facilitators, doing all we can to open up our publicly funded spaces and resources to people and communities.

**The Launchpad Gallery – The Science Museum**

The Science Museum took the opportunity of the redevelopment of the Launchpad gallery to design a space that actively promotes intergenerational inquiry and exploration. Staff had observed that the original gallery, although highly popular with families, did not encourage parents and children to interact together. The children were switched on by the gallery but the adults were more passive – looking after coats and bags whilst their children explored. The new gallery, opened in November 2007, has been specifically designed to promote conversations between children and adults that will spill out beyond the gallery walls – and it does this brilliantly. This is an exemplary learning space – from the floor material that reduces noise through to the innovative video signs that model how to use interactives (particularly helpful for those less confident with science) – that has considered the impact of design on successfully opening up resources to family groups.

**The Big Lottery Community Libraries programme**

This programme is establishing new community learning spaces in 50 libraries across the country – spaces that are being shaped and developed by the local community and that will provide new opportunities to open up the space and resources in new ways.

**2. The museum, library and archive network could act as the backbone of a joined-up lifelong learning sector**

Museums, libraries and archives offer access to resources and collections that provide both adults and children with authentic learning experiences that support them to learn throughout their lives, as individuals, in groups and as families. They provide opportunities for people to immerse themselves in deep learning experiences or to dip in and out of learning – both of these types of learning are equally valued and respected.

Much more could be done to integrate the lifelong learning offer available in museums, libraries and archives with that available from other local learning providers, including further education, higher education and community learning providers – providing learners with increased opportunities and choice about what and how they learn, as well as signposting them to further opportunities. There is much more we could do, for example, to ensure digitised museum, library and archive resources, funded through public investment, are used to their maximum.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle to securing this more joined-up approach is a lack of real understanding of what each constituent part of the broad lifelong learning sector offers and possibly, a lack of willingness to look beyond our own worlds – the cultural sector is as guilty of this as anyone.

### **3. Ensure museums, libraries and archives are truly universal by filling gaps in audiences and reaching out further**

Museums, libraries and archives identify themselves as universal services that are open to everyone and well placed to support people to learn throughout life.

Whilst this is true, museums, libraries and archives could take a harder look at who is using their services and who is not. Much was learnt from the market segmentation approach adopted by the National Year of Reading team to ensure the target audiences for the year, including white working-class boys and adults with poor basic skills, received a targeted message about the importance of reading for life. The Renaissance in the Regions museum programme has also successfully reached out to priority audiences through targeted activity and outreach. A particular gap that the sector needs to plug is their offer to older people. With an increasingly ageing society the sector should consult older people on the future design and development of services to ensure that they are not excluded from using our services. There is perhaps a need for the development of an older-people-friendly campaign to match that of the family-friendly campaign which has made great advances in the way museums and libraries support families. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Taking Part survey indicates that participation in culture drops sharply at 75 years of age. Museums, libraries and archives should consider what more they can do for those aged over 75 in their communities.

#### **Participation in libraries and museums at the local level now – summary findings from DCMS Active People Data (Dec 2008)**

- 53.8 per cent of adults in England visited a museum at least once in the last 12 months – participation in museums is increasing.
- 48.5 per cent of adults in England visited a library at least once in the last 12 months.

#### **What research tells us about users (based on 2006 data)**

- Adults taken to a museum by their parent as a child had significantly higher recent attendance rates than those not taken (53 per cent and 29 per cent respectively).
- Research at Renaissance museums shows that repeat visitors are more likely to be local and 70 per cent of repeat visitors are from socio-economic groups D and E.
- Non-white adults are more likely to be library users than white adults.
- Library use is relatively high for people under 16 (72 per cent of 11–15 year olds visited a library at least once in 2006–7).
- Virtual use of archives is high – 55 per cent of adults visit only via the Internet.
- There is evidence of differentiation in the drivers of participation amongst different groups in society. Identity and cultural heritage are important to black and minority ethnic (BME) groups – culturally relevant content drives interest and engagement among BME groups.

#### **What research tells us about non-users (based on 2006 data)**

- Lack of interest and/or time are the main reasons for not visiting a museum.
- There is evidence that making culture a social activity is particularly relevant for attracting new museum audiences in socio-economic groups C2, D and E and that social networks are key to driving demand amongst excluded audiences.
- 45 per cent of library non-users cited 'lack of time' or 'no need to go' as the main reason for not visiting libraries.
- The typical library non-user is older, white, educated below Level 3 and has no children.
- Research suggests that targeting key non-library user groups, such as local champions amongst the 16–24 year olds and working adults under 44 without children, would raise participation in libraries.

## **4. Develop the core role of public libraries as local information hubs in their communities**

Library and information services have always been important providers of national, local and grassroots community information. Librarians are skilled at handling information – sourcing, classifying, managing and retrieving – and provide a valuable service by signposting and connecting people to other services. Their role as local information hubs should in future effectively be Directgov.co.uk on the high street.

Information is an extremely valuable commodity that can have a direct impact on people's life chances – having access to good quality information cannot only improve your economic outcomes, but also affects your social, personal and learning outcomes too.

Library services already provide a comprehensive information service – covering employment, learning and skills, health, housing, childcare, tourism, travel and so on – but perhaps have not done enough to promote and disseminate this valuable service. Much more should be done to develop and formulate an 'information offer' in the same way that libraries have developed a sophisticated 'reading offer' over the last decade.

A thriving culture of lifelong learning needs to be underpinned by a high-quality information service that successfully signposts learners to opportunities, whether these are offered by HE, FE, local authorities, third sector, private providers or self-organised learning groups.

### **Living Libraries**

A growing number of libraries are already extending their information role by joining the Living Library movement. Living Libraries provide opportunities for people to find out about different people's lives and interests by borrowing people, not paperbacks, at their local library for a 30-minute chat – an opportunity to learn from each other and share experiences and perspectives. Living Libraries aim to break stereotypes and tackle prejudice by opening up opportunities for people to explore different experiences and interests across cultural, social, gender and generational boundaries.

## Making integration happen

Museums, libraries and archives could do more to integrate their learning opportunities with other lifelong learning partners. There is no reluctance to open up opportunities to wider audiences, but perhaps some reluctance to pin down what our contribution to this offer could be – it is this lack of clarity that can act as a block to joining things up. If we are not clear about how we contribute to lifelong learning then it is not surprising that potential partners across both the formal and informal learning spectrum are unsure about how our creative resources and approaches could be integrated into their learning programmes and activity.

The evaluation of the Renaissance education programme ‘What Did You Do At the Museum Today?’ found that although teachers highly valued the learning opportunities on offer in museums – reporting that pupils who could be disruptive or unmotivated in the classroom were switched on by the types of learning activities offered in museums – they did not feel confident about replicating these approaches and ideas in their classrooms without the support of a museum educator. As a result, continuous professional development for teaching staff is now built into all MLA-funded learning programmes for children and young people. Perhaps this is a model that the Inquiry could look at as a mechanism for encouraging sustainable partnerships to flourish – opportunities to share skills, approaches and expertise between different adult learning providers to cement a truly joined-up lifelong learning movement.

### Building a new future

*The Learning Revolution* White Paper provides an opportunity to build a new approach. To some degree John Denham, then Secretary of State for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS, now BIS), has put the challenge of turning his vision of an informal adult learning movement suitable for the 21st century into our hands to turn it into a reality.

Local authorities have the responsibility to drive forward change at local level. They will play a key role in bringing a wide range of partners together – formal learning providers, informal learning providers, local authority services, third sector partners, self-organised learning groups, private providers – who collectively can offer the local community a diverse, rich and sustainable menu of lifelong learning opportunities. Museums, libraries and archives have an important role to play as an integral part of this joined up movement.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) has made a number of commitments in *The Learning Revolution* White Paper to support the join-up:

- to work with the museum, library and archive sector to articulate a core adult learning offer;
- to encourage 3,000 individual museums, libraries and archives to sign up to The Learning Revolution pledge;
- to launch a £100,000 Challenge Fund to help museums, libraries and archives open up their spaces and resources in new ways to encourage sustainable partnerships between the sector and self-organised groups of learners; and
- to set up an Adult Learners Board to encourage new alliances and approaches between museums, libraries and archives and wider adult learning partners to flourish.

### Developing a core adult learning offer

The sheer diversity, richness and variety of the contribution museums, libraries and archives can make to lifelong learning has perhaps led to lack of clarity in articulating a clear learning offer in the past. MLA intends to take a fresh approach by identifying a number of core learning elements that are consistently offered across the sector. We see this as putting the building blocks in place that will help new partnerships flourish. Individual museums, libraries and archives will of course add their own bespoke adult learning offers to this core – but identifying the core is important.

### Conclusion

The independent Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning and *The Learning Revolution* White Paper provide the imperative for museums, libraries and archives to a) step up and be clear about the role they play in supporting lifelong learning and b) identify what more they could do to support a rich mix of lifelong learning opportunities to flourish in local communities. Museums, libraries and archives now have the best opportunity they have ever had to be part of a joined-up adult learning sector that together can provide more learning opportunities for more people.

In doing this we need to:

- **Be more outward facing** – there is a strong tendency in museums, libraries and archives to talk to each other about how we link to broader policy and not engage wider partners in these discussions or consider wider perspectives and approaches. We need to change this.
- **Be clear about how the sector supports learning** – there is a reluctance by some in the sector to spell this out, a view that the support offered is indefinable. If we are not clear about what we do to support learning ourselves, how can we expect wider partners to be clear?
- **Worry less about whether our value is primarily intrinsic or instrumental** – does this debate get in the way of us joining up and working more effectively with others? I would argue that we should put our energies into the bigger opportunities presented by the emerging integrated lifelong learning movement.

As communities splinter and become more isolated, with more of us spending time in front of screens and pursuing individual activity, opportunities for people to learn together in public spaces will become increasingly important. There are few places in local communities that are open to everyone, irrespective of age, creed or social class – museums, libraries and archives have a crucial role to play in a future refocus on lifelong learning.

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