



## Select Committee on Communications and Digital

### Uncorrected oral evidence: Covid-19 and the creative industries

Tuesday 30 June 2020

3.05 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Gilbert of Panteg (The Chair); Lord Allen of Kensington; Baroness Bull; Baroness Buscombe; Viscount Colville of Culross; Baroness Grender; Lord McInnes of Kilwinning; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Meyer; Baroness Quin; Lord Storey; The Lord Bishop of Worcester.

Evidence Session No. 1

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 1 - 9

### Witnesses

**I:** Iain Watson, Director, Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums; Sharon Heal, Director, Museums Association.

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## Examination of witnesses

Iain Watson and Sharon Heal.

Q1 **The Chair:** Welcome to Iain Watson and Sharon Heal. I will invite them to introduce themselves in a moment. The Committee is looking at the impact of Covid on the creative industries, in a fairly broad sense, including museums and the cultural sector as well as performing arts. I am delighted to have our two witnesses here.

We will take questions from the Committee for about an hour. The session is not broadcast but a transcript will be taken and published as evidence that the Committee will use in its future deliberations. Before I invite our witnesses to say a few words by way of background, Baroness Quin, who is on the Committee, is not participating in this first session but has a close and relevant interest that she would like to put on the record.

**Baroness Quin:** I wanted to declare an interest as chair of the board of Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums. Its director, Iain Watson, is with us today, so I will not be asking any questions, although I am very pleased that both he and Sharon are with us, and that there is a strong north-eastern presence at today's event.

Q2 **The Chair:** Iain Watson is director of Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums, and Sharon Heal is director of the Museums Association. Thank you both for joining us. Could I invite you to say a few words of introduction, as well as some very brief initial observations on the impact of Covid on your sector? We will explore the issues in greater detail as we go around the table of Committee members.

**Iain Watson:** I am director of Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums, a board member of the North East Culture Partnership, and part of the steering group of the English Civic Museums Network. I am talking both from a north-east perspective and from a wider perspective about civic museums. Sharon will say a bit more, when she introduces herself, about the diversity of museums around the country, but civic museums are the museums on the high streets in our towns and cities. They often have wide-ranging collections, and they have a strong civic role in terms of economic impact, social benefit and health and well-being.

From the north-east perspective, one of the unique things about the north-east is that we have the North East Culture Partnership. We are the only region to have developed its own case for culture; we have made the case to Government about the benefits of culture in the region, what we can do and how we are reacting to the Covid crisis in an area that has particular health, social and economic challenges.

Many of our civic museums are supported by local authorities, which are having a very taxing time at the moment in continuing to deliver the statutory services and being absolutely on the front line, along with Public Health England and the NHS, of supporting and dealing with the Covid crisis.

Museums have been having a very varied response in how they work. I have staff who are currently redeployed into care homes and food banks and who are out on the main shopping street in Newcastle helping people keep to designated lanes and ensuring safety in queues, and helping on volunteer lines, supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

We are also putting out a lot of material digitally, although we are very aware of the digital divide, so we are ensuring that we put physical resources out and are working with the third sector to get those physical resources to people, particularly to children and families who do not have access to broadband and who cannot benefit as easily from the digital resources that are out there.

I hope that is enough for a quick introduction, and I am very happy to work with the questions that members of the Committee have.

**The Chair:** We will certainly unpick some of those issues.

**Sharon Heal:** Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee. As well as being the director of the Museums Association, I am a trustee of the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds, which is my home city, as well as chair of trustees of the Museum of Homelessness, which is a very new active museum that has been very active during the present pandemic.

The Museums Association is a professional campaigning membership body for everyone who works in and with museums. We represent individuals and institutions across the UK. We have around 13,000 individual members and we represent around 2,000 institutions. The emergency response from government and funders has been hugely welcome. We know a lot of institutions and individuals out there that are struggling, and it has been great to see funders step up with that emergency response. Many are just holding on because of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and other funding that has been made available. That has been a lifeline for many museums. The questions that we all have are about what is next, as museums begin to reopen, and what the recovery package is for those institutions.

As Iain said, the sector is very diverse and quite complex in some ways in its governance, sustainability and business models. It has become clear that some element of public funding is fundamental for all types of museums. In the first wave of impact, it was the independent museums such as the Mary Rose Museum or the Charles Dickens Museum in London that felt the first direct impact of losing all their income through retail, cafes and visitor ticketed experiences.

The university museums have been hit hard. The campus museums are dependent on their universities reopening and they are not always high up the universities' list of priorities, as higher education has been hit quite hard, as we know. University museums have done much during the last five to 10 years to open up beyond their campus boundaries. We do

not really want to see them going back to being departmental research collections.

As Iain has mentioned, we have the local authority and former local authority civic museums, and many of our members are expressing real concern about the impact and cost of Covid-19 so far for local authorities. Somebody told me this morning that the cost in Nottingham, for example, is estimated to be £85 million. That is just the cost of dealing with Covid-19.

There is also a loss of income generation because of the pandemic. I do not know whether Committee members saw that the chief executive of Leeds Council mentioned in the press a couple of weeks ago that if there was no emergency package of funding for that local authority, all museums and galleries would be closed because they are non-statutory services. That would be a huge and dramatic loss for that city and the people and communities of that area. We have the national museums and the much-loved national institutions, which have many of the same issues, such as the loss of earned income, but also in the scale of their operation and the expectation that they will reopen as soon as possible.

Iain mentioned some of the impacts on the workforce. There have been multiple impacts from redeployment, furlough, and now redundancy, and we have been trying to support the health and well-being of the workforce. We do not want the fact that there will be fewer jobs to work against any attempts to diversify the sector.

I will leave it at that as an overview, but I am happy to answer any questions that are forthcoming.

**Q3** **Baroness Bull:** This is not a conflict of interest, but I unexpectedly have to declare that King's College London was integral in the setting up of the Museum of Homelessness. I had not made that connection, Sharon, so it is very good to see you and to see that the museum is still going from strength to strength.

I want to pick up on the question of the workforce. We have heard a lot about the various elements of the creative workforce falling between the various income support schemes which the Government were able to put in place, including the furlough scheme. I wonder if you can give us more detail on how this is affecting the sector, which I know is a complex ecology between permanent staff and creative freelancers who go around from place to place.

I just want to add that it is more normal in these sessions that you would tell us of all the wonderful things that you are doing, and you would want to be telling that side of your story, but we want to hear about the challenges that you are facing at this time, so do not pull any punches here.

**Iain Watson:** Sharon mentioned some of the immediate challenges that have been faced by some of the independent museums. The real worry is what happens next. There has been a presumption in some places that

reopening is the answer, but reopening is not necessarily the answer because there is a balance between the costs of reopening and the income that you generate.

I have just come off a call with cultural organisations across the north-east, some of which have already opened because they have outdoor sites, and returning numbers are between 10% and 30% of the number of visitors you would expect at this time. If you are at 10% of visitors and you are relying on gate money coming in to support your organisation, that will impact straightaway on jobs. Equally, going wider than the museums, the call I was just on also had people from theatres on it. We are very aware that a large number of theatres across the country are now in consultation with staff about redundancies.

Back where I am, most of my staff in the main organisation are local authority staff. Like many others, we are waiting for the Arts Council announcement tomorrow about emergency funding. All the staff in our trading company are furloughed. We have furloughed 100% of staff, which means that we have stopped all our trading operations. We will start to bring people back from tomorrow, 1 July, on the basis that we can bring people back part-time.

The problem has been expenditure going out with no income at all for those trading operations. I have flagged up with DCMS the plight of trading companies in museums. The first range of redundancies that you will see will be in trading operations in museums that have no reserves, because any surplus is passed to the parent body. They inevitably have costs, even if it is just the cost of paying for their credit card machine, and they have no or very little income coming in.

**Sharon Heal:** We have already seen some quite dramatic impacts on the workforce. Culture is a devolved responsibility. The National Trust for Scotland, for example, has put 400 posts at risk of redundancy, and it is inevitable that some of those posts will become redundant in the medium term. Many other institutions are now having to make very difficult decisions about bringing people back from furlough or saying that those posts do not exist anymore.

We anticipate that some museums will not reopen at all and there will be a shrinkage in the number of museums throughout the UK, and there will definitely be a shrinkage in the workforce. That places a burden on those who are left behind trying to maintain that public offer, with the uncertainty about the future of their organisation hanging over them.

An extension of the job retention scheme would be hugely useful. I accept that it may be unlikely, but it would be useful to have something that accepted the very diverse ecology that we have in museums and the cultural sector that includes permanent staff as well as volunteers. A lot of organisations have an elderly volunteer base. Those volunteers will not be able to come back into the institution in the first instance, so there will be a gap in capacity.

Understanding that ecology, it would be useful for there to be direct interventions and measures that come through a recovery package and recognise and support the really valuable contribution of individuals in making that offer to the public through our museums and galleries.

**Baroness Bull:** Can you say something about the role of freelancers in the functioning of the museums, and perhaps the particular stresses that they are facing at the moment?

**Sharon Heal:** Yes, certainly. The freelance sector is an integral part of the museum sector and covers all sorts of roles and responsibilities: delivering learning and engagement or programmes; a consultant coming in to support a capital project; creatives, artists, storytellers; or people who come in and do the programming side of museums. They offer something additional to the permanent and core staff in the institutions, and they have a fundamental role in reaching out and engaging with communities.

**Iain Watson:** For many of them, it is a portfolio, so they might be doing a bit of teaching in a university and they might have a part-time contract in a cultural organisation. They tend to work with a network of cultural organisations, so they might work in museums but also in art centres and theatres. It is very mixed. Some of them have been able to benefit from the self-employed scheme and some of them have struggled. Some organisations have continued to provide support to their casual workers, and some have not been able to do that because they simply have not had the resource to do that.

Q4 **Baroness Grender:** Thank you so much for coming along and for everything that you are doing, which sounds amazing. Although we are all fully aware that at the moment the cultural sector and your sector are in intensive care, in effect, you will also probably be part of the recovery, or are expected to be part of the recovery, and therein lies an enormous challenge for you.

I want to address the apprenticeship levy issue in particular—the use of apprenticeships and young people who, especially in some of the communities that you serve, will be finding it very difficult indeed. We have heard from Boris Johnson about an apprenticeship guarantee, but we have seen none of the small print on that as yet.

It would be great to get a sense from you of how you currently use the apprenticeship levy and how you think it might need to change in the current circumstances to best meet the needs of the projection, which is a large number of young people coming straight out of school and not going into work. Have you used any of the models like the London Theatre Consortium, so using a levy in a more flexible way across various organisations? It would be lovely to get a sense of that from both of you.

**Sharon Heal:** Apprenticeships have not been used as much in museums and galleries as they have been in some other parts of the cultural sector. There are a couple of reasons for that. The entry route into museums and galleries is usually—not always—through a second degree and through

one of the many museum studies and the heritage courses. Frankly, there has been an oversupply into the sector from those courses.

There have been some fantastic examples of working across several institutions in order to get museum apprenticeships working. London Transport Museum had a great scheme that led to the diversification of its workforce; it brought people through on an apprenticeship scheme and worked with the FE sector on that. I do not know if Iain has any other examples.

In terms of public policy, it would definitely be welcome if that apprenticeship route was supported and was more effective for museums and galleries. It might resolve some of the issues with the lack of diversity in the workforce, as well as working with local communities to find meaningful engagement with young people in the workforce.

**Iain Watson:** As Sharon said, some of the work we have done has been with other cultural organisations. We have done quite a lot of work with Sage Gateshead across different arts organisations, recognising that the skills you use as a lighting technician in a theatre are very parallel to lighting in a museum. We have had some success with that, using a creative apprenticeship programme.

The relationship with colleges and LEPs is absolutely fundamental. I have just this week set up a conversation with our LEP in the north-east and one of our very large local colleges, Newcastle College Group, to start having this conversation again and to re-energise this. It is particularly important in the STEM and STEAM discussion, too. There was a lot of interest in the STEM, but we are obviously very much pushing the importance of arts and creativity in that base as well. We want creative engineers who use that creative approach to learning, developing the R&D and developing that innovation and some of that cultural learning. We want the importance of that to come right through from schools into colleges and into apprenticeships.

On what you were saying about young people, one of the important things for us in the north-east is that historically we have seen a drain of graduates moving out of the north-east as people have graduated. Now, people will not be moving as much, so we would like to think about how we can work with LEPs, for example, to retain that talent and help to rebuild and re-invigorate that creativity as part of the cultural recovery.

**Baroness Grender:** I want to take it a tiny bit younger and ask you about NEETs—those not in education, employment or training. A lot of the projections suggest that as we come out of Covid this will become a significant challenge. I wonder if you could just address your remarks to cover those in particular. Also, have you had any thoughts about using the new T-level placement, which is coming in at the end of this year, as a shift between school and apprenticeships systems?

**Iain Watson:** We have been looking at the T-levels. My learning team have some thoughts about those, but it is very early days on that.

In terms of working with young people not in education, employment or training, we have been involved in two schemes, both of which were successful but were very resource-intensive, and I do not think it will surprise you to hear me say that. One was supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, where we worked with young people who were generally either third or fourth-generation unemployed; I know it is horrific to say that. We worked with about 40 young people over a period of time, and about three-quarters of them got into employment or training as a result. It was a programme on cultural volunteering.

We also manage Culture Bridge North East, which is the network that works between the cultural sector and the education sector. Through some grant funding that we were able to award, we worked on Teesside with the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art and Teesside University in taking those kids from Jobcentre Plus, where Jobcentre Plus had been unable to find any placements for them, and getting them some placement opportunities, particularly in website design, and giving them some very basic digital skills.

I would have thought that they had digital skills, but they did not, because they just did not come from a world where that was open to them. They were 16 and 17 year-olds who had never opened a laptop computer. We did some great work through MIMA and Teesside University, working with them and the bridge network. They are little pieces of work, but they relied heavily on investment, because it was very resource and time-intensive. You need a lot of time sitting with people to help and support them.

**Sharon Heal:** There have been fantastic examples on top of the ones Iain has given. National Museums Liverpool has a strong track record of working with NEETs as volunteers and then bringing them into the museums, such as the Imperial War Museum in Salford and other institutions, which up their employability skills and basic and core skills.

Part of the problem has been that this has been project-funded. It is great to have that project funding from organisations such as the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, but when the funding stops, unfortunately the projects tend to wind up as well. It would be great to have something that is consistent and consistently funded, which comes out of government or some of the other funders in the sector, and which says that this is exactly the arena that museums could and should be working in, building on the successful projects they already have and where they have those connections, and going beyond the boundaries of the institution.

We have been seeking a profile for this kind of work across other government departments beyond DCMS, so that DfE and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government can understand the delivery and the impact that museums can make in this area and many others. We would really like to get that profile there.

Q5 **The Chair:** Can I just briefly pick up on this workforce issue? Sharon,

you said that, overwhelmingly, institutions tend to recruit at graduate level, particularly into curator roles. Both of you have also talked about what the sector is doing to improve diversity, and you have described some of the programmes.

We are currently carrying out an inquiry into the future of journalism, and one of the issues that we have talked about is exactly what diversity is. We have talked to witnesses about the importance of diversity of thought in institutions. The kinds of people who will come in from a largely academic background will not necessarily bring diversity of thought into your organisation. They will probably be much more metropolitan and much more liberal in outlook than the population and your visitors.

Are you simultaneously, while doing all these other things, recognising a potential issue with diversity of thought and underrepresentation of non-metropolitan, socially conservative people in your institutions? If so, is are institutions doing something about it? That question is for Sharon for the sector as a whole, unless Iain has something to add.

**Sharon Heal:** I am sure Iain could talk about the position in Tyne & Wear. As the Museums Association, we think about diversity across the piece, so it is not just about the protected characteristics from a government or statutory point of view; it is about diversity in its widest sense. It might be about class as well as about ethnicity and gender, but absolutely it is about a diversity of views and viewpoints.

One of the brilliant things that we have seen over the last five or 10 years is museums opening up to a diversity of opinion and discussion. After the EU referendum, for example, we had a conversation in the sector about how we, as a museum in Sunderland or in the north-east, can hear the views of our local populations and have those views represented and discussed within the museum.

Museums are great convening spaces in local areas and quite often the only civic spaces remaining, and as such they can provide the space for contemplation and discussion and hopefully the opportunity to hear views that are different to our own. We have witnessed the rise of populism and the polarisation that has taken place in society. Museums, through their collections and their spaces, can offer places where we can have some of those conversations, discussions and debates and hear each other's views, even if we might not agree with them ourselves, either as workers in the sector or as different members of the community.

Bearing in mind equalities, we would definitely see museums as being open spaces that are porous and that can hear that diversity of views and opinions.

**The Chair:** Iain, do you want to add anything, particularly on the diversity of workforce, particularly at curator level, for example?

**Iain Watson:** I was going to point out that the workforce are not all curators. Curators are a very small percentage. The front-of-house workforce is probably much more representative of the broad community.

We run a programme in-house called TNT—Try New Things—which allows people who are not curators to come up with ideas for programmes. Front-of-house teams have come up with ideas for exhibitions and we have implemented them, so there are ways in which we are working to cover issues to do with the perceptions of a metropolitan elite, whether or not that is true.

**Sharon Heal:** One of the possible silver linings of the pandemic is that, because museums are having to throw a lot of resource at reopening institutions, some of the staff who are traditionally back of house—curatorial, conservation or research—will have to take a turn front of house in order to reopen those institutions safely.

That will provide those who are back of house with a good opportunity to see the reality on the front line of welcoming diverse visitors into the institution, and other front-of-house staff with opportunity to look at different roles across the institutions. So the idea of a museum worker rather than a curator, an educator, or front of house or back of house—just people who work in museums—would be really welcome.

**Q6 Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** I should declare an interest as I am a regional ambassador for the British Museum.

Iain mentioned the returning rate of visitors being currently 10% to 30%. I want to explore the financial impact of social distancing and the impact that has on the sustainability of exhibitions, as well as of the museums in general. What proportion of income that would be expected from retail, catering and exhibitions will be affected by social distancing, on top of any downturn in entrance fees? Sharon, could you give me a national perspective? Iain, I would be very interested to hear what is happening in Tyne & Wear.

**Sharon Heal:** Yes, of course. I would add the rider that it varies from institution to institution, where you are in the country, and what type of operation you are running. We have not only had that loss of earned income during lockdown but, as you point out, we are also anticipating reduced audiences across the board. The surveys that have been on visitor appetite show that, at most, 30% of expected audiences will come back in the first instance because of worries about the virus and how safe spaces are, and museums will do all they can to reassure people. That is what we are expecting in the first instance.

There has been a huge improvement in museums and galleries across the UK in their proportion of earned income versus public investment, and that has been a real transformation over the last 10 years. The majority of museums would be looking at a 50:50 split of earned income and public investment. That is a broad generalisation. It will be different for every institution, but every type of museum has really upped its game in retail, catering and ticketing for temporary exhibitions, if not permanent collections.

That has increased, which is great, but the flipside is that income is lost if you only have 30% of your audience coming back on reopening and the

fixed costs are the same, if not more. I am sure Iain can talk about this, but reopening an institution will cost just as much if not more, because you have to put the social distancing measures and the signage in place, and you also need people front of house to do the warm welcome, guide, support and steward people, reassure them and make them feel safe and able to use the spaces in a safe way. They will have to deal with that as well as with limited audiences, who might not be able to spend as much time or money in the spaces.

**Lord McInnes of Kilwinning:** If social distancing were to continue for a year at one metre, would you foresee that affecting very negatively a certain type of museum that relies on getting a high footfall through to keep it financially sustainable?

**Sharon Heal:** Yes, absolutely. This is not just about the size of the organisation. There is an expectation that museums with large gallery spaces or with outdoor spaces could implement one-way systems and find it easier to reopen and welcome visitors back, but there are smaller museums, often in historic buildings, that cannot implement a one-way system or that rely on interactivity. Museums with a family focus may have a real emphasis on interactivity and play and learning through play, and they will find that particularly difficult because they will not be able to reopen those spaces safely in the first instance.

The Roald Dahl Museum, for example, which has an emphasis on families and family learning, and learning through play, will find it really difficult in a very small space to reopen to anything like the same number of visitors. If you have that one metre in place, even in institutions where you can have a safe one-way system, you will, by force of the numbers, welcome fewer people into the institution, which will have an impact then on audience numbers and earned income. Every institution would want to reduce that only when it is medically and scientifically deemed safe to do so, but it will impact as long as it continues.

**Iain Watson:** There is also the museums' reduction in funding even up to the point before Covid. My own organisation has had a 60% reduction in its local authority funding since 2010, yet we are still delivering the same service by a mix of much greater efficiency and income generation. There is very little left.

Sharon has talked about the challenge of getting numbers in and social distancing. As a very specific example, one of the sites I run is a heritage steam railway with a small museum. We are starting to put up the tickets, which the public will be able to book soon, in the middle of August, but obviously we have to book out about four seats around each of those spaces on the train. Whether that will even pay for the coal for the steam railway or not, I do not know yet. We are literally crunching numbers. We are pretty good at arithmetic and all our sums add up at the bottom of the page, but whether we have made the right guesses and assumptions is impossible to tell. We will only know as we start to reopen. That support through the process, however long the social distancing lasts, will be critical.

Sharon touched on the interactivity and the experience. I have a concern about whether people will return as frequently if the experience is not as interactive. It is about how we can develop that. We are creative people and we are thinking about that. Up in the north-east, about 70% of my visitors are return visitors, and they come because it is great fun, it is interactive and there is stuff to do, so we are having to approach how we do that. There is opportunity there as well, so we can do things differently. We have to seize that opportunity.

**Q7 Baroness Buscombe:** My question follows on from what you have just been saying. I have been pushing since mid-May to reduce the two-metre rule to one metre, because I felt that nothing was possible at two metres. Thank goodness we are going down to one metre at least.

You both finished by saying what more the sector can do to decrease the challenge of the financial and educational issues posed by social distancing—in other words, the creative solutions that you are coming up with. I will give you one quick thought. I am amazed at the number of pubs and restaurants that are supposed to be opening this weekend that have failed to change their websites in order to attract people to come in. It is quite surprising.

You are a creative world and a creative sector. What more can you do to put pressure upon us and government? Bearing in mind that Oliver Dowden has now set up the Public Health England group, which is looking at working with people from your sector, the arts sector and performing arts to see what can be done, what are your ideas? Where can we press some buttons?

**Sharon Heal:** Museums have actually done a brilliant job of getting their offer online, from a standing start in some cases. When the lockdown was first instituted, I looked across a variety of museum websites and was quite surprised that most of them just had a sign on them saying, “The museum is closed because of the Covid-19 lockdown”, and, “Watch this space for more information”.

Since then, museums and individuals in the sector have done an absolutely brilliant job getting tours online, podcasts, apps, et cetera. I do not know if you are aware of this, but there was a partnership with the BBC as part of their Culture in Quarantine series, called Museums From Home, which was basically run by exactly two creative freelancers, Sacha Coward and Dan Vo, who brought together interviews with curators and learning and engagement staff to talk about their collections and the objects in their collections. It was a great, innovative, fun way of engaging online.

As the Museums Association, we run the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. We diverted £350,000 of that to an emergency fund called Sustaining Engagement with Collections. That was an immediate response to the lockdown. We tested the idea with some of our members first, but we were overwhelmed by the number of applications to it. It was 10 times oversubscribed, because there is a real desire to do things differently, to do digital and to do online. Not all organisations have the

capacity and the skills. Not all audiences have access, as Iain pointed out. There is a real digital divide, but there have been some absolutely stunning examples of engagement, from the Holocaust centre taking its Holocaust intergenerational learning online through apps to the Imperial War Museum working with communities and other networks throughout the UK to talk about its collections. These are really great examples.

In terms of government and public policy, it would be really great to have a recovery fund that gives museums and the people who work in them the headspace to explore, to innovate, to take risks and to think about the different ways of operating that we will need when we reopen our cultural institutions. Museums might want to open to the public just two days a week, for example, and then just do outreach with schools and communities for the rest of the week. Opening hours might be different, because people have different working days and working practices after working from home for three months and because of the pressures on public transport, et cetera. It would be great to have that opportunity to really innovate, to take some risks and to test different ideas and different ways of working.

My Primary School is at the Museum is one of those examples. It was a pilot that ran two or three years ago, taking whole classes of primary-school-aged children into the museum setting to learn for a whole term in that setting, to put them in a different environment. It was evaluated through a really rigorous academic evaluation and had really positive outcomes.

We are now supporting a campaign to get that going again and to work in partnerships with schools that have a pressure on their space because of social distancing and all the things we know about. We want to use some of the museum spaces innovatively and work in partnership with museums and their staff to teach within the school setting. If you want to maintain the social distancing and bubbles in an educational setting, you can do that by using some of the museum spaces. That could re-forge some of those really interesting relationships, some of which already exist and some of which could be built out of that. It is about that space, time and a little support to innovate and to do things differently.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Thank you, that is really helpful. I agree with you about online. My local museum, the Ashmolean, is doing some amazing things. I was supposed to spend five minutes there, but I spent five hours.

Until recently, I was a Minister for Work and Pensions, and I applaud Iain's connection with Jobcentre Plus. There may be ways in which that could be enhanced, because there are so many people who may not have thought about what they can do to help either on a voluntary or part-time basis, given that we have in-work benefits to support people who are freelancers and so on. A lot of them do. We spend £50 billion a year on in-work benefits, and we also need to take into account how we support people through this crisis. Iain, what are your ideas?

**Iain Watson:** I will give you two specifics. You mentioned the Secretary of State. Baroness Quin, on behalf of the North East Culture Partnership, has written to the Secretary of State about a north-east plan for a year of creative social distancing. We developed an idea in that partnership that it would be fantastic to have a challenge fund to allow creative people to develop creative approaches to that. The chair of the partnership, Jane Robinson of Newcastle University, has written to the Secretary of State asking for support for that idea of a year of creative social distancing. We think that creative people have a lot to bring to that idea, and I absolutely take your idea about how important it is to bring creativity to that.

In terms of how we communicate some of the message, my own organisation picked up quite early that two metres was not going to stay, so all the signage that we have done just says "social distancing"; there are no dimensions on it. Where we have used dimensions, rather than put a distance we have put a number of Roman shields. We have done everything on a graphical basis. Let us have a bit of fun with this and let us be creative. We shared that information freely, and quite a number of cultural organisations in the north-east are using a similar model in terms of getting their communications across.

Second is the basic thinking about what we do. I have talked a little about that 10-year journey in terms of creating a much more commercial and enterprise-led business model for museums and cultural organisations. The present crisis has proved that that has not worked in some areas. It has not been a sustainable business model. There are challenges with it. There may be areas where, instead of thinking about how high we can make the pile, we may need to focus more on the quality of what we are doing and the quality of the outcomes. It may be about rethinking some of those.

I cannot say what the business model will be yet, but one point is that where we are delivering health and well-being benefits and employment benefits we need to make sure that that is supported by the health sector and the employment sector rather than the cultural money delivering those outcomes. This goes back to the importance of that conversation across government.

**Baroness Buscombe:** Can I make a suggestion? This is just an idea, as someone with a mostly legal but partially business background. Perhaps there are some people in your area with strong business experience who might be able to help with why the business model is not working—you can explain that to them—and how you can adjust that, and there may be some more innovative ideas that they could give to you, which may or may not work but that might be worth exploring. I am sure there are people out there who would like to help. I know some.

Q8 **Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall:** What you said, Iain, about the necessity for business models to evolve in reaction to what has happened is very pertinent. However, can I go back to something that Sharon said quite early on in this discussion about the potential for serious losses in

your region because the museums and galleries are not part of the local authority's statutory obligations? That tells us that the arts and the cultural sector still do not really sit at the centre of wider political thinking.

In those circumstances, in the current situation where there are lots of voices clamouring to be heard, the role of advocacy for this sector is extraordinarily important. Do you feel heard where you need to be heard, and is there any more that we as parliamentarians can do to help you be heard?

**Sharon Heal:** I want to say something about how the cultural sector is valued at government level and how the contribution of the cultural sector is valued, because they are slightly different things. I was called by the *New York Times* the other day. We are quite often called by the press to respond to the announcement about the reopening of museums. The journalist said to me, "Do the UK Government not support the cultural sector in the same way as the German Government, for example, or the European Governments, who have announced multi-million-euro rescue packages?" I said, "No, I think the Government support the cultural sector, but you have to understand that it is a mixed economy".

It would be great if politicians across government understand the economic, public and social value of museums. We know, from all the case studies and evidence that we collect, that museums can really enhance the quality of people's lives and their health and well-being. They can create better places for us to live and work, and they can provide space for debate and reflection on some of the difficult issues that we talked about, which are contentious and can divide communities. We know that. The people who are engaged in this Committee know and understand that. Do politicians on other committees and in other departments understand it? We need to get that message across to other departments and to other politicians, because it is really vital.

Museums are delivering amazingly well, even under lockdown, against some of those government agendas. I spoke to some of our representatives from Northern Ireland this morning, who said that they had a really fantastic dementia-friendly training programme which they ran in care homes and in a museum setting, giving respite to carers and people who suffer from dementia, and they have moved that entirely online. They can do the whole programme online. They obviously want to move it back into a real physical space at some point, but they have shown real flexibility in their approach.

That is a fantastic example of museums delivering beyond the boundaries of the institution on an issue that is really pertinent and topical and which needs some creative solutions in society. We would like those advocates in health and other departments to really understand the contribution that museums are making at that level.

**Iain Watson:** We need to be aware of the cost of the loss if museums were not there. We are now seeing on our high streets the cost of the

loss of retail. One of the towns where I run museums has lost Marks & Spencer, Thorntons and Dorothy Perkins. Debenhams is not reopening. That town's high street is looking pretty devastated.

If the civic museums were not out there on the high street, it would be pretty horrendous. That is the message about what we can do and the contribution that we can make. We are loved, but there is a danger that people do not recognise what would happen if we were not there. We need more people to use them. Fifty-four per cent of adults have visited a museum in the last year, but we want more of those people coming in and we do you to get that message out and getting it across government. This is not just about DCMS; this is about MHCLG, BEIS and DfE recognising the contribution that we are making.

Listening again to information coming out about the potential curriculum focusing on core subjects, I have to say that, as important as that is, cultural and creative education is absolutely key. We can do it, we can contribute to that, and we need to be supported to do that. Any help you can give us with that messaging would be gratefully received.

**Q9 The Lord Bishop of Worcester:** Thank you very much indeed for what you have said so far. I declare an interest, not in the sense of a conflict of interest but a genuine interest. I spent most of the 1990s as vicar of St Luke's Church in Wallsend, and right next to the church at that stage was Swan Hunter shipyard. It is one of the museums that you run.

When I was there, the engagement with the museum service was not great amongst the deprived community with which I worked, but it has hugely increased now. We had a shout out for the Ashmolean, so I would like to have a shout out for the thing that you produced for Chris Killip's exhibition at the Laing, which had fantastic pictures of Swan Hunter shipyard. It really brought home to me that what you are doing can help cultural awareness, historical awareness, social capital and all sorts of good things in the way you have been suggesting.

You have talked about parliamentarians and others being more aware. Can I hone down on to what public policy support would really help you to increase the wonderful work that you do?

**Iain Watson:** That is lovely to hear. I started my museum career about 100 yards from St Luke's, so I know that spot very well. It is a great part of the world. It is an interesting example, because we are working really closely in North Tyneside—as you know, that is the local authority around Wallsend—with the clinical commissioning group. We have seen some initiatives on social prescribing, but in general they have not been transformational for museums. They have been great projects for people who have been directly informed, but it is in the larger-scale projects where you can work in an area with something like a CCG.

Segedunum, the Roman fort there, is a charging museum, but through an initiative we have let people from the local postcode, NE28, come in for free—people who, in a post-industrial town, represent some of those social challenges. Again, it is about public policy supporting initiatives like

that, because although there is a government policy on free museums, that is free national museums, and many museums across the country have charging, so it is about policy that would support that.

We have talked about the fact that museum services are non-statutory, yet many of the museums around the country preserve our national heritage without support directly to do that. They do not preserve it for the sake of preserving it; they preserve it for the sake of the stories and the important messages that we tell and engaging with and making meaning for those people.

In terms of public policy, we need a strategic approach to getting a support network. If there is excellent work happening in one part of the country, it would be really beneficial to get across how we get together to build that so that we are not re-inventing the wheel, a hundred times in some cases. There is work to be done supporting that through strategic agencies and through the work of some of our universities, some of which we have seen flagged up in the chat.

**Sharon Heal:** It is great that we have the Cultural Renewal Taskforce. We, as the Museums Association, have been part of the museum and gallery task force and have been supporting its work on reopening, but it does not stop there. We need that task force to think about what is next and what the recovery plan looks like. As Iain says, it has to be strategic.

In terms of public policy, we have some direct asks about working with local government to invest at that local and regional level in museums and galleries across the piece. We need to get support in the Museums Association and the wider sector to rethink the future of museums and the role they can play in a post-Covid society. We need to support the work on diversity and leadership and the workforce.

We need to set aside funding for specific things. We have not talked about Black Lives Matter. Museums can play a fundamental role in exploring some of those issues through their collections. That might be through talking about the role of empire and colony in Britain's past and bringing that up to date with contemporary discussions about racism and equality.

We also need to fund things like My Primary School is at the Museum, making sure that DfE and DCMS work together so that the cultural offer is there for all schoolchildren when they go back to school and re-engage with their learning journey.

**The Chair:** Can I thank Iain and Sharon for their time? It has been a very interesting session. Thank you for all the work that you are doing in your respective institutions and organisations, and thank you to all the colleagues who are working with you. We are about to talk to people representing the performing arts, but we recognise the breadth of the UK creative industries and their social and economic importance to Britain's future. The evidence that you have given us has been very helpful and will inform the Committee's thinking in the future. Thank you, Iain and

Sharon, for taking time out to be with us this afternoon.