

## Written evidence submitted by The Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery

Submission to DCMS Select Committee

19 June 2020

This document presents the combined picture from the principle art galleries and collections of Manchester : the Whitworth (part of the University of Manchester) and Manchester Art Gallery (part of Manchester City Council), who work together under the umbrella of the Manchester Museums Partnership.

The two galleries share the same Director and share a number of staff and work closely in partnership with the Manchester Museum (also University of Manchester).

Here we report on the impact of COVID from the perspective of the civic art galleries – which includes Platt Hall, formerly the Gallery of Costume.

### What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

Along with the rest of the sector the Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery closed to the public on 17 March and remain closed for the foreseeable future, with no firm guidance on a date for re-opening.

Re-opening will be governed by the respective parent bodies, the University of Manchester and Manchester City Council, in line with government advice and Public Health England.

The Whitworth Park, Art Garden and its sculptures have remained open to the public in accordance with government guidelines and supported by the management of Manchester City Council.

Skeleton teams are working in rota to maintain the buildings and ensure the security and safety of the nationally designated collections.

The galleries have maintained an active online programme through social media, video conferenced family/community workshops and website platforms.

The Whitworth, in line with the University response, has identified as many staff as possible to participate in the job retention scheme with about half of staff on furlough at present. All employees of Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) are Manchester City Council (MCC) employees so have not been furloughed. Where possible, MAG staff are maintaining active work programmes from home, and a small number of staff have been temporarily redeployed elsewhere with MCC.

It is clear that the gallery will be either closed or operating with minimal attendance and social distancing for the next 9-12 months, with research suggesting that we would have at least a 70% reduction in visitor numbers (in the year before COVID these were around 360,000 for the Whitworth and 750,000 for Manchester Art Gallery).

At Manchester Art Gallery, the layout of the building and the staffing resource that will be needed to manage social distancing will restrict public opening to only part of the building. In addition, within current staffing resources, the days and hours of opening will be limited.

The impact on capacity and footfall will be severe; possibly less than 1000 visitors per week (less than 10% of previous footfall).

The cafes and shops at both sites are closed and it is unlikely that the footfall through the buildings and the reduction in opening hours will enable these operations to trade profitably once the venues reopen. The loss of income currently presents a budget pressure for each gallery of around £0.5M over the next 12 months.

At MAG the café and events business is run in-house through the Trading Company of the Gallery's Development Trust. Staff are currently furloughed, and the council have agreed to defer payment of the 2019/20 venue hire commission to help cash flow. Without further support, the business will become insolvent in Autumn. Our recovery plan for next year is dependent on being able to maintain and grow our earned income.

### How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?

To date there has been minimal support from DCMS or Government that has reached the city's cultural institutions. The job retention scheme has provided some benefits for a handful of Whitworth staff and for the Trading Company at MAG.

ACE has been impressive in its response to COVID and making emergency funds available. However the focus so far has been on survival in the short-term which has meant that neither of our institutions (within the umbrella of their governing bodies) have qualified for these funds, having financial models that mean the crisis will not have its full impact until after September 2020. An application to the NPO Emergency funding has been made at MAG to support the Trading Company, but this will only enable it to survive for a few more months once the Job Retention Scheme ends in October.

Funding bodies such as Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Outset Partners, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Freelands Foundation and Contemporary Art Society have also been quick to respond to make available new funding packages or allowing existing funding to be extended or have time scales adapted.

### What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

Whilst there are significant budget pressures this year as a direct result of Covid and public closure, the risk to the galleries will be felt acutely in future years, as a direct consequence of the impact of Covid on Manchester City Council and the University of Manchester.

At the Whitworth the University is facing a £270M reduction in income and each University department has been asked to reduce their budgets accordingly. We have been asked to model a 25% reduction in the University contribution, from £1M to £750k which would be combined with existing savings and the loss of earned income through café, events and commercial enterprise. This scenario, with the knock-on effects felt in grant income and research funding represents a 41% reduction in budget from the previous year. This is projected to involve the loss of 27 jobs and the loss of valuable expertise for the culture and education sectors. As such this presents an existential threat to the gallery and indeed to the visual arts culture of the city.

At Manchester Art Gallery, the city council is facing a £160m budget pressure as a result of costs of dealing with the crisis and lost income. So far, compensation from government has

been only a fraction this – c £33m. The impact on MAG’s cash limit from the council is unknown and we are bracing ourselves for significant cuts. Our ability to offset these cuts through growing earned income is dependent on being able to safeguard our Trading Company and retain the successful café, events catering and venue hire business.

The impact of cuts in core funding and earned income will be severe, including:

- Programme budgets for exhibitions and public and civic engagement, education, social projects, health programmes and community relations will be reduced by at least 60% with the immediate communities of the city being affected most.
- A diminished museum that is less appealing to investors, philanthropists and supporters. We are already seeing the loss of philanthropic income and donations both through closure and diminishing resources available to individuals and businesses.
- As with the wider effects of the pandemic, the BAME population will be affected disproportionately. Programmes designed to tackle inequality and justice, or more culturally diverse exhibitions will be harder to fund. Shrinking institutions will find it harder to diversify the workforce and give opportunities to young people of colour or from working class backgrounds.
- The galleries will need to look at reduced opening hours, fewer touring exhibitions or exhibitions based around loans or new commissions, and more displays using in-house collections or local artists. In Manchester, across both art museums, we may need to stop producing exhibitions altogether.
- A shrinking and narrowing of the talent pool already beginning through Brexit will be accelerated through the decline in activity and opportunity.
- Enforced job losses across departments will lose expertise not just in education, collections care and curatorial fields, but in commercial, fundraising, visitor services and buildings maintenance.
- At the Whitworth disposal of collections and assets within the wider university estate has become a likely scenario to plug the gap in loss of income – this brings huge reputational, political and social issues.

### What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have dealt with Covid-19?

The drive towards commercialisation, enterprise and ‘sustainability’ has led public cultural organisations exposed to market forces, with the loss of cultural capital and benefit for all.

The lack of national narrative around the social value of museums has been notable and not serving the sector well in its claims for assistance and planning a societal recovery.

### How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

There needs to be a recalibration of culture and its public perception that emphasises the social impact of culture in health, education, ecology, diversity and equality. This message needs to be fed up to government and will underpin the fundamental role of culture in people’s lives.

The role and use of culture and the arts needs to be embedded into the curriculum and for this to be acknowledged across policy in Treasury, Cabinet Office, DfE. All schools need to be incentivised to use museums and galleries, theatres and music venues within the curriculum

to expand teaching, opportunity and creativity. This will generate more use and more revenue, as well as increasing access and making for a more creative and productive nation.

Museum Exhibition Tax relief must continue beyond its current sunset clause, and should be reviewed and expanded to cover wider cultural activity within the museums sector (the current focus solely on exhibitions does not reflect wider core purpose)

Regions and cities should introduce tourist taxes, through hotel rates for example, for cultural projects that benefit residents and improve the quality of life and life chances.

There need to be clear incentives for philanthropy, public giving, bequests, donations, etc

Strategic, joined up funding initiatives between public arts institutions working in preventative health, education, ecology, social justice, regeneration and social programmes such as:

- Health programmes with NHS and DHSC
- Education in museums with DfE
- Ecology and food poverty with DEFRA
- Cultural and Community Development with Home Office

Working to encourage Universities to value culture, the arts and humanities within education in teaching, learning, research and social impact

There is a need to address the non-statutory status of museums and galleries within local authorities. Many museums and galleries face an existential crisis - especially if/when more LA's declare section 114 notices.