

## Written evidence submitted by Manchester Museum

### DCMS Evidence from Esme Ward, Director, Manchester Museum, the University of Manchester.

The sector support agency Museum Development North West are based at Manchester Museum. She is a member of the University Museums Group, National Museum Directors Council and Chair of the national Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

Manchester Museum is the largest university museum in the UK, owned by The University of Manchester. Home to extraordinarily diverse collections (over 4.5 million items), all of which are officially 'Designated' for their national and international importance. One of the leading visitor attractions in the North West of England, typically welcoming over 500,000 visitors per year. Its mission is to build understanding between cultures and a more sustainable world.

Manchester Museum has embarked upon its most ambitious capital development in a generation - *hello future*. Driven by a renewed commitment to social and civic engagement, it is dedicated to establishing the UK's most imaginative, inclusive and caring museum. At its heart will be an architecturally exceptional, two-storey extension, which will increase the Museum's floor space by over 830m<sup>2</sup> to include new Exhibition Hall, South Asia Gallery (partnership with British Museum), Chinese Culture Gallery, new entrance and facilities with key focus on inclusivity and age-, disability- and dementia-friendly design. Due to open 2022.

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

There has been an immediate impact of the Covid-19 crisis on different aspects of museum operations.

**Collections, conservation and exhibitions:** Public access to collections for research, teaching and enjoyment has been severely compromised. Capacity to respond to research enquires and facilitate academic research and teaching is substantially reduced. Current loans activity has ceased. We've stopped all practical conservation and prep work on the collections for loans and exhibitions – particularly problematic planning for international loans and uncertainty around dates of transfer or return home in the next 12 months and how different countries will have different protocols, levels of the virus and guidance on how and when museum staff can enter the country to retrieve loans (We have large-scale touring exhibitions in US and loans in Belgium). We have paused all internships and conservation placements.

**Fundraising:** In fundraising terms, it's been a mixed picture. We've clearly been impacted by a number of major potential funders either temporarily pausing accepting new applications, or realigning their fundraising focus to prioritise front-line work addressing the immediate crisis. Similarly, with individual philanthropists – a number of our ongoing conversations are currently on pause. This has been particularly relevant to our capital fundraising – feedback from major arts/cultural sector funders is that now is not the time for considering major capital bids. Priority focus is on supporting at-risk organisations to survive the immediate, short-term crisis. As a result, we have currently re-focused our fundraising to prioritise relevant, project-based revenue fundraising (and where possible, budget relieving activities). Pleasingly, we have evidence that

there are sector funders maintaining their interests and grant-giving in these areas (grant of £101,850 from The John Ellerman Foundation; opportunity to apply to the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, etc.)

**Staff and volunteers:** There have been several impacts, including temporary loss of key personnel due to furloughing and staff/visitor wellbeing has been impacted by the closure of sites and the furlough of personnel. The majority of volunteering work has been suspended in the short term, with a knock-on impact to both project delivery and on volunteers themselves who derive evidenced social, health and wellbeing outcomes through volunteering. We are particularly concerned about the impact on student volunteers and those in vulnerable groups. We have put in place remote volunteering activity e.g. digitisation projects, wellbeing programmes and participation in citizen science projects has increased sharply.

**Capital/building works:** Manchester Museum capital project is experiencing significant delay and additional costs. External funders (including ACE and NLHF) have reiterated their support and flexibility at this time, however there remain concerns that match funding will be difficult or impossible to raise over the next year. There is also programme elongation and costs due to staff availability and supply chain delays. Uncertainty about physical distancing remains. Manchester Museum's £13 million capital project, due to open 2022, will urgently need flexibility and further support from grant funders in order to be completed.

**Finances:** In addition to the obvious commercial losses, Manchester Museum as a university museum faces an indefinite recruitment freeze, in place across the institution, placing important projects and next year's contributions to university teaching and research at risk. This also compromises our capacity to engage freelance workers to deliver or support activity. University museums are perceived as a non-core functions by their parent bodies and disproportionately targeted in savings. In Manchester, we are modelling 25% savings in addition to the lost commercial income. This will result in significant redundancies, undermine our ability to fully reopen and result in a loss of expertise and knowledge.

**Digital:** We have seen a significant growth in digital engagement. Our specially launched mobile site [www.mminquarantine.com](http://www.mminquarantine.com) has reached new audiences and live broadcasts reach tens thousands of people all over the world (56 different countries). We have learnt and are adapting to new digital and broadcasting formats. For example, South Asian Heritage Month will be launched online and we have appointed Digital Internships (young people) to lead the programme.

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

The quick response by ACE and NLHF has been widely appreciated, but there are some organisations that will fall through the cracks in terms of eligibility (e.g. those museums officially working towards Accreditation and non-Accredited sites). Other museums aren't in immediate need, but will require significant support further down the line. The principle barriers to accessing emergency funding are: eligibility for current schemes; funders indicating to university

museums that they are a low priority; and, unwillingness to compete with more vulnerable organisations.

The job retention scheme, after some initial uncertainty about eligibility for university museums, has been welcomed and 50% Manchester Museum staff have been furloughed.

As we look towards reopening on a much reduced capacity in autumn and beyond, we have growing concerns about capacity issues and ongoing financial support.

Funders have advised university museums not to apply /signalled that university museums are a low priority. Yet university museums have fallen between the cracks and despite significant financial pressure there has been no obvious source of emergency funding from Research England or HE sector.

With capital projects at present, there's been little sign of additional financial support available specifically to help address the impact of Covid in realising our capital plans. We continue our conversations with NLHF and eagerly await clarity on existing capital schemes and processes to apply for additional funding to help bridge the gap.

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

The full financial impact on the HE sector is unknown, however, university museums and galleries are anticipating substantial losses. Contributors cite the potentially devastating impact of the combination of loss or reduction in all areas of funding: university, public, philanthropic, commercial and endowment.

**Financial and fundraising impact:** In fundraising terms – it's a mixed picture. We'd expect a prolonged economic recession would be very likely to have significant impact upon trust and foundation giving through declining value of investment income (although the experience of the financial crash in 2008 was that levels of giving recovered reasonably quickly); and potentially a similar impact on individual, philanthropic giving.

However, the crisis has also seen huge outpourings of public generosity and donations, and has seen people re-evaluate personal priorities and motivations. This could create new opportunities around individual giving – especially if elements of our work are demonstrably seen to be contributing towards societal healing and resilience in the light of the pandemic.

The availability of longer-term, 'recovery' funding would be incredibly valuable in putting things on a longer-term footing. Additionally, there could be a strong, sector-wide and nation-wide emphasis on incentivisation of philanthropy – e.g. through government matched giving schemes, promotion of Gift Aid and tax-efficient giving, etc.

**Workforce and employment:** Concerns for the workforce are acute and include the risk of redundancies, irreplaceable loss of collections and research knowledge and staff wellbeing.

Museums express particular concern that progress towards diverse and representative museum workforces will falter or reverse. The inevitable loss of key personnel due to redundancies will require a focus on succession planning and review of support processes in place. There is growing concern about staff wellbeing and the divisive experiences of furloughed and non-furloughed staff.

**Reopening:** Social distancing requirements will reduce visitor numbers dramatically. There is a huge reputational risk for organisations that don't or are unable to implement social distancing measures on-site (pinch-points and access to buildings are also a concern). On reopening museums are concerned about maintaining public safety of course, but also fear progress on diversifying audiences will be undermined and that social distancing will challenge social and learning outcomes for visitors. A fall in schools visits will have an impact on income and crucial widening participation work. We need to support museums to work with schools in new ways and closer strategic collaboration between Arts Council, DCMS and DfE will be critical. In relation to higher education, support for researchers is compromised, contributing to a drop in future research outputs drawing on collections that may last for years. Museums form an important part of the research infrastructure and support and engagement from Research England will be essential to ensuring this remains so.

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

Museums and museum sector bodies have had the opportunity to feed in to decision-making via contact with ministers and government departments since the beginning of the crisis. Greater consistency in approach, communications and more joined up working would support the sector even better (e.g. there are a number of organisations looking at public perception of returning to museums and heritage sites, whereas one such study would likely be enough). Finally, most of the schemes to support businesses have been unsuitable for museums.

#### **5. How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation?**

##### **Supporting recovery in communities:**

Museums and the cultural sector have a key role in supporting wider healing and social resilience post-Covid. Museums are at the heart of communities and can tackle loneliness, support community wellbeing and provide joy and inspiration in recovery period. Bodies like the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, in partnership with the National Association of Social Prescribing are well placed to develop specific programmes and services for the future. University museums like Manchester Museum also see significant opportunities to become more relevant, inclusive and to deliver greater social impact through new forms of collaboration, knowledge exchange and research in response to the 'big questions' Covid 19 has thrown up e.g. in the fields of arts and health, social mobility and ageing.

**Digital Upskilling and Capacity Building:** Strategic investment in digital infrastructure and expertise would support the entire sector. There is an urgent need for support for museums to switch to a digital first approach across public engagement, collections and teaching. Social distancing and remote working will necessitate new digital skills and resources for the short and medium term. This includes staff resource to carry out the digitisation of collections and archives and develop content. Digital evolution seems inevitable, but we face chronic and long term underfunding in this area, patchy infrastructure and knowledge. Yet digital output and engagement will be key over the coming months/years and will require additional resource.

**Financial support and philanthropy:**

DCMS could provide powerful support and advocacy for the role and value of university museums, which are seeking greater investment from Research England and HE sector. Longer-term commitments and flexibility from major funders for the sector (by extending existing funding packages by 1 or 2 years) will ease the pressure and uncertainty the sector faces.

HMRC Exhibition tax return scheme continuation should be promoted.

New forms of civic philanthropy will be required and DCMS support of a major programme or focus on promoting and incentivising philanthropy and the cultural sector, particularly in the regions, would be critical. In addition, is there a role for DCMS to join up/advocate for the potential of our sector in accessing the availability of wider funding streams (governmental and non-governmental) relating to health, education and civic role of museums.