



Museums and galleries

Rationale

For the purpose of this guidance, museums house "*material evidence of people and their environment*" and galleries house "*artistic work*".

Museums and galleries also encompass science and exploratory centres, libraries and archives.

They may be home to expert conservators and academic researchers. In addition to presenting their collections, they actively promote understanding and enjoyment through experience-based learning.

Local museums and galleries may be easy to miss and possibly hidden away in a public library that maintains a very low profile. However, such places may offer a wealth of learning opportunities and will be an educational resource that is close at hand and easily available without incurring significant costs or requiring major disruption to normal educational routines. A town hall might also house an archive, museum or art collection, as might the local park, a sacred place or a historic house.

Leaders should ensure that their group understands that other visitors may wish to pursue quiet academic study.

Special Features and Learning Outcomes

Museum and gallery visits provide the following learning opportunities:

- access to professionals and experts – young people meet and work with leading experts. This can give added value to their learning.
- curiosity and creativity – whether through seeing, touching, hearing, feeling. A young person visiting a museum or gallery is in the presence of genuine artefacts which raise questions, stimulate thought and bring academic study to life.
- a new study environment – in the presence of experts and authentic materials, young people are able to challenge their preconceptions and think in new ways.
- exploring culture and identity – museums and galleries tell us about our past, present and future, drawing on the material evidence of human lives all over the world. As such they provide a valuable route to understanding cultural diversity and our own place in the world.

- building local communities – museums and galleries are often at the centre of a local community and provide a sense of continuity and cohesion.
- skills centres – by exposing young people to experts and by putting their subject into a real world context, museums and galleries are able to help learners think differently about study and its purpose.

Range of provision

- Freelance educators – professionals who specialise in this area. They are experienced in delivering museum and gallery learning projects in partnership with schools and learning providers. See www.gem.org.uk to access a database of freelance education professionals.
- Local authority – some local galleries and museums are run by local authorities and deliver learning programmes through these sites as part of their Heritage Services.
- Public museums and galleries – a large number of national and regional museums and galleries are now free to visit. Many of these provide learning programmes facilitated by education professionals.
- Private museums and galleries – these are run by private individuals and organisations or by charitable trusts. Not all of these organisations will have learning provision, but they might be accessed through the use of a freelance education professional or through the local authority.
- Learning Projects - run by heritage or arts organisations, often focusing on the local environment. These projects partner schools or their equivalents with museums and galleries for the development of progressive learning programmes.
- One-off events – short programmes or one-off events that enable free or unrestricted access to museums and galleries e.g. Museums and Galleries Month, Heritage Open Days.

Quality standards

Sites open to the public such as museums and galleries must meet legally required health and safety standards, and it is not necessary to seek assurances about these unless specific issues have been raised by a risk-benefit assessment.

Where a site is not open to the public (e.g. where special arrangements have been made to visit a closed site), then assurances about health and safety should be obtained.

Where a site holds a Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge, many employers will accept this as sufficient assurance of safety standards. Visit Leaders should check their employer's policy.

There are also quality accreditation schemes in place such as the Sandford Awards that accredit heritage sites for excellence in education provision. Large heritage bodies such as English Heritage and the National Trust also monitor standards in their education provision.

Learning support provision

Many heritage sites provide support to make a visit more useful:

- Specialist learning support staff - museums and galleries often have dedicated learning and education officers who are trained to deliver learning activities and programmes that focus on curriculum subjects and skills. Many museums and galleries provide opportunities to meet professionals e.g. scientists, conservators, archivists, librarians, artists.
- Interactive materials – some museums and galleries have interactive materials on site such as video conferencing facilities, interactive screens, audio guides etc
- Web-based materials – many museums and galleries have developed resources such as lesson plans, worksheets and activity ideas that are downloadable from their website. These websites often have interactive capacity and provide a stimulating way of accessing information about the site
- Pre-visit tours – these are often provided free of charge to teachers and group leaders. They offer opportunities for Visit Leaders to become familiar with the site and provide material that can be used to prepare learners for their forthcoming visit
- Evaluation and planning – museum and gallery education professionals are very experienced in providing planning support for a visit. They may be able to offer help with the evaluation of learners' experiences after the visit
- Outreach – some museums and galleries develop long-term relationships with schools and learners and provide support by visiting learners in their own establishment

