

Accessing museums and galleries: A practical guide

Source: Anra Kennedy

Once you've taken the decision as a school to make use of your local museums and galleries, where do you begin? Work with schools is central to the agenda of the vast majority of UK museums, galleries and science centres – the first step for schools is to find out what's going on and where you could fit in.

This article lists a range of ways in which your school could make the most of your local museums service and also the many exciting national initiatives currently taking place across the UK.

Local museums service

- Find your local museums and their contact details by searching www.24hourmuseum.org.uk.
- Contact the museum's education officer if contemplating a visit. This will enable you to find out about any materials they might be able to send you and to discuss any particular needs your pupils might have, from physical access to the learning outcomes of your visit.
- Find out if your local museum offers any community outreach. Do they offer loan boxes? Do they run workshops or give talks in school? Does your local museum offer work experience for secondary pupils?
- Many museums offer CPD training for teachers in the form of INSET days at school or in the museum, twilight workshop sessions, lectures or teacher resource packs for use in the classroom.
- Ask about any partnership projects the museum is running at the moment – do they need schools to host evaluation projects, test learning materials or pilot new programmes? Fostering strong links with your local museum can bring many benefits to both parties.
- Ensure your school is on any local museum mailing lists so that you receive details of events and exhibitions well in advance.
- Museum education officers, like teachers, are always extremely busy people, so if the museum has a website it's a good idea to check to see if the information you need is there before calling them.

Please remember that many museums, particularly the smaller local museums and independent institutions, do have to make a small charge for any materials loaned or sent out, tours and workshops, in order to sustain their education service.

National initiatives

All the organisations and initiatives listed below exist to encourage, enable and inspire creativity within schools, through partnerships between schools, museums, galleries and artists. These organisations are all non-commercial. Their work is

funded either through government grants, commercial or philanthropic sponsorship or charity fundraising.

24 Hour Museum: www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

A visit to this website is the easiest way to find general visitor information, trails and details of curriculum-linked resources on museums, galleries, heritage sites and science centres. Its cultural news stories and reviews are updated daily. It has a database of almost 3000 venues across the UK and is a government-funded charity.

Show Me: www.show.me.uk

This is the children's version of the 24 Hour Museum. It is targeted at children aged 4 to 11 and gathers together the best online resources produced by the museum and gallery sector for that age group. It publishes weekly news stories for children, has an interactive map of child-friendly museums and separate sections for teachers and parents.

Campaign for Learning in Museums and Galleries: www.clmg.org.uk

CLMG exist to inspire and promote learning in the museums sector. The 'Learning in Your Region' page on their website is particularly useful, containing a list of regional museum and gallery agencies, with contact details, plus reports on educational projects, both past and ongoing.

Museum in the Classroom: www.campaignformuseums.org.uk

This is a teacher resource pack produced by the Campaign for Museums. It's designed to inspire and help teachers to set up their own museums in schools as a teaching resource. See the case study 'Museum in a Classroom' to hear about the process from a teacher's point of view. Order the booklet or view it online from the campaign website and on the teachers' page of 24 Hour Museum.

Artworks: www.art-works.org.uk

Artworks support visual arts education in schools. They work with galleries and schools across the country, facilitating artists-in-residence schemes, conducting in-depth research into art and design resources and facilities in schools and organising the annual artworks awards and Children's Art Day.

SciZmic: <http://www.scizmic.net>

This is one for your school science club. It's a national network of science and discovery clubs, many of them based in schools, but all with close links to the many interactive science centres across the UK. They organise mass experiments, debates and a range of events on the web, in schools and in science centres, for children aged 10 to 14.

Big Arts Week: www.bigartsweek.com

This scheme is all about getting professional artists into primary schools to work directly with the children, for free. A range of creative people get involved, including architects, dancers, sculptors and musicians. Many museums and galleries get involved too. Even if you don't want to participate directly, the ideas bank on their website is well worth a look.

The Campaign for Drawing: www.drawingpower.org.uk

The aim of this organisation is very simple – they want to get everyone drawing and do so through their annual 'Big Draw'. In 2003 there were hundreds of events across the country, many of them in co-operation with museums and galleries. They commissioned a wonderful online drawing workshop from Access Art (www.accessart.org.uk/drawingtogether) so there's no need to even leave the building to take part.

Creative Partnerships: <http://www.creative-partnerships.com>

This is a government initiative, aimed at developing creativity and imagination in children, through establishing partnerships between children, schools and cultural organisations. They work in economically and socially challenged areas of England. Their website has lots of information on projects they've undertaken and current thinking on creativity in education.

Ecsite-UK: <http://www.ecsite-uk>

Billed as 'the science and discovery network' this is a great place to find out about the wide range of discovery centres we're lucky enough to have in Britain. All are geared towards interactive learning.