

United Kingdom

Report by

Sara Selwood

University of Westminster

with Maurice Davies, Museums Association

Introduction - Key Issues

It is increasingly the case that hard data is required for a multiplicity of reasons: to support advocacy, not least to present the case for support to government; to assess museums' efficiency in relation to funding; to inform decision making; to establish, develop and evaluate policies; to identify trends; to measure the progress that the sector is making, not least in terms of delivering government objectives. A current preoccupation is with measuring the impact of museums. Responsibility for national museum statistics falls to *Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)*, the government's advisory body, which succeeded the Museums & Galleries Commission in April 2000. Following the devolution of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, MLA's remit is primarily confined to England.

At the time of writing (October 2003) there is no dedicated statistical time series on museums, which covers the whole of the UK. The Museums & Galleries Commission's DOMUS database (see below) was abandoned after the 1999 survey, and the only other UK-wide, year-on-year time series are, *Sightseeing in the UK and Visits to Visitor Attractions*. These present the findings of annual surveys conducted by the National Tourist Boards of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which monitor trends in the visitor attraction market including museums. There are, however, an increasing number of regular reports, which cover local and regional trends (in particular, financial statistics) and the activities of different types of museums. Pulling together a national picture depends on the collation of existing data sets. But although the museums sector currently suffers from a paucity of data, MLA is, in principle, working to develop a "coherent, workable, consistent and sustainable system", which covers all its domains. At present, it is working towards fulfilling this vision by identifying and evaluating what data are currently available; identifying bodies that are collecting data; establishing the needs for data within the sector; identifying gaps in data provision; and developing and implementing, where practicable, methods and mechanisms for filling them. MLA's first *Digest of Statistics*, which focuses on England but also includes data for the rest of the UK, is currently in production and due for publication later in 2003. Part of this is specifically devoted to museums (Selwood, forthcoming).

Details of the meeting of the museums sector to discuss its statistical needs and various of the ground clearing studies commissioned (including a retrospective study of DOMUS) are available on the MLA website at <http://www.mla.gov.uk/information/evidence/ev-stats.asp>.

Definition of Museum

The UNESCO definition of museums is not consistently used by the UK's cultural bureaucracy. UNESCO's category j (monuments and sites) is applicable only if a permanent collection exists, while zoological and botanical gardens (which contain living specimens) are not generally counted as museums (UNESCO category k).

The definition of museums most commonly used is that of the Museums Association, the representative membership body for people who work in museums and galleries in the UK. Whereas it previously defined the museum as a process-driven institution "that collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit", since 1998 it has recognised museums as being primarily for "the people": *Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artifacts, which they hold in trust for society.*

This definition governs the Registration Scheme administered by MLA.

Existence of Museum-related Laws

Few museums and galleries in the UK are bound by specific legislation. Many are administered by local government on a voluntary basis. Whereas their provision of public libraries is statutory, local authorities are not obliged to support museums and galleries. Other museums are provided by universities, again on a voluntary basis. Some museums are constituted as companies or charities, and are established under normal company and charity law and have no special status as museums per se.

However, the national museums and galleries are subject to specific legislation. There are several relevant Acts of Parliament pertaining to them, including for example the British Museum Act 1963 and the National Heritage Act 1983. Such acts establish the purpose of each national museum, specify the make up of the boards of trustees that are responsible for them, and set out their powers and duties. For example, most national museums are prohibited from disposing of items from their collections, except under extremely limited conditions.

The absence of legislation controlling most museums has led to voluntary systems of regulation. The non-governmental Museums Association, for example, has a Code of Ethics and the government's advisory body, MLA, administers the Registration Scheme for museums and galleries in the UK. Although both schemes are voluntary, almost all museums in the UK subscribe to them.

Categories used regarding Type of Collection

There is no current comprehensive data set on UK museum collections, although there are several ad hoc studies at the level of individual nations and localities. The most recent UK-wide data available was gathered for the 1998 DOMUS collections survey. These are shown in the table below. This source suggests that the estimated total number of objects by collection type in UK museums was 149.30 million.

Estimated total number of objects by collection type in UK museums, 1998

	No of objects (millions) in UK museums
Agriculture	1.45
Archaeology	23.16
Archives	9.39
Arms & Armour	0.71
Biology/Natural History	92.76
Costume/Textiles	2.05
Decorative /Applied Arts	2.22
Ethnography	1.99
Fine Art	4.03
Geology	7.19
Maritime	0.44
Medicine	0.35
Military	1.09
Music	0.30
Numismatics	2.16
Oral History	0.28
Personalia	0.50
Photography	8.86
Science/Industry	2.86
Social History	5.23
Transport	3.87
Total	170.89
Base	995

Source: Carter et al, 1999: 24

Categories used regarding Type of Ownership

There is no current comprehensive data set available on type of ownership. As of July 2003, 1,850 individual museums were included in MLA's Museum Registration Scheme. This is UK-wide and requires compliance with the Scheme's standards. MLA considers it a reliable representation of museums in the UK. This is because museums, particularly non-nationals, are motivated to register due to the benefits that accrue to them from registration, in particular financial benefits. However, this is not universally the case – especially with respect to small, volunteer-run museums which don't aspire to public funding.

Number of UK museum sites in the Registration Scheme by ownership, 2003

Government agency	34
Independent	730
Local authority	691
National	52
National Trust	156
Armed services	100
University	87
Total	1,850

Source: MLA

Existing Data - Basic Figures and Diagrams

As already said, there is no current comprehensive data set on museums. The statistical picture of the UK museums sector has to be built up from a series of different sources.

Visitors

Visits: Data for 2002 suggests that there were 74.6 million visits to UK museums and galleries. This figure is based on returns from 1,001 institutions which defined themselves as museums (Visit Britain, 2003). The same sources suggest that 26% of those visits are by children (based on an analysis of 52.2 million visits).

Frequency of visiting: Recent data suggests that of those visiting museums and galleries, the average frequency of visiting amongst the English population is 2.87 per annum; amongst the Scottish population, 3.24; amongst the Welsh population, 2.84 and amongst the population in Northern Ireland, 2.46. (MORI, 2001).

Dwell time: Average dwell time per visit is 112 minutes, with the majority of visits (65%) being up to one hour (VisitBritain, 2003).

Institutions

Number of institutions: It is often assumed that there are 2,500 museums in the UK, but ultimately this depends on what is defined as a museum and the levels of standards to which they comply. In July 2003, 1,850 individual museums were included in MLA's Museum Registration Scheme (see above).

Funding: The latest comprehensive estimate of public funding for museums and galleries in the UK was for 1998/99 and identified a total of £607.1 million as coming from a variety of sources including central government, local government, and the National Lottery and embracing capital as well as revenue funding (Selwood, 2001). The figures for 2002/03 are, as yet, incomplete but show the following:

A Guide to Museum Statistics in Europe

Latest available data on funding of museums in the UK from major public sources (including estimates)

£	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
<i>England</i>			
Department for Culture, Media and Sport			376,000,000
Ministry of Defence			13,449,000
Heritage Lottery Fund	37,965,996		
Local authorities	175,780,000		
Arts & Humanities Research Board		5,627,272	
<i>Scotland</i>			
Scottish Executive			
Heritage Lottery Fund	2,724,195		
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council			
Local authorities		34,081,000	
<i>Wales</i>			
National Assembly			
Heritage Lottery Fund	236,470		
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales			
Local authorities			11,399,000
Bus sponsorship		124,104	
<i>Northern Ireland</i>			
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure			11,428,000
Heritage Lottery Fund	5,026,000		
Local authorities			
Department of Education			
<i>Provisional totals</i>	221,732,661	39,832,376	412,270,600

Source: Selwood, forthcoming

Workforce

Paid staff, Full Time Equivalent: The latest dedicated survey to consider FTEs is based on 1998 data.

Staff in UK museums, 1998

Permanent (FTEs)	12,590
Temporary (FTEs)	2,775
Freelance (all)	853
Base	1,188

Source: Carter et al, 1999

Volunteers

The same survey identified 25,206 volunteers working in UK museums.

List of References

Carter S, Hurst B, Kerr RH, Taylor E and Winsor P (1999) *Museum Focus. Facts and figures on museums in the UK. Issue 2*. London: MLA

MLA website: www.mla.gov.uk/information/evidence/ev-stats.asp

Digest of Statistics data gathering and commentary: Museums

http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/ev_stats_overview.doc

Selwood S 'Profile of Museums and Galleries', in: S Selwood (ed.), *The UK cultural sector: protect and policy issues*, London, pp. 342-359

VisitBritain Strategy & Insights Division on behalf of the VisitBritain, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, VisitScotland and Wales Tourist Board (2003) *Sightseeing in the UK*. London: VisitBritain