

Reading Museum Service

Access to Learning Policy 2004

Policy Framework

This policy complies with other Reading Borough Council policies and should be read in conjunction with other Reading Museum Service policies. This policy document supersedes the 1997 Education Policy passed by the Arts & Leisure Committee in March 1997, and supports Reading Museum Service's Mission Statement and Strategic Aims that were adopted in April 2000.

Mission Statement

To be a centre of excellence in providing opportunities for lifelong learning through real objects and original documents.

The mission statement and service aims have been developed within the context of Reading's Cultural Strategy and corporate aims. The service produces an annual service plan, working within a framework of longer-term plans and policy documents on specialist subject areas.

Policy Content

The contents of this policy document are divided into five sections, each section containing numbered policy points as follows:

1. Strategic Overview of Learning and Museums - Policy - 1.1 to 1.9
2. Formal learning - Policy - 2.1 to 2.31
3. Informal Learning - Policy - 3.1 to 3.14
4. Social Inclusion - Policy - 4.1 to 4.5
5. Evaluation - Policy - 5.1 to 5.3

SECTION 1

Strategic overview of learning and museums

Learning, whether formal curriculum-based or informal and self-directed, is high on the national agenda. Education and lifelong learning are increasingly being linked to agendas in other areas, particularly to employment, health, leisure, social inclusion and community projects.

Reading Borough Council's Cultural Strategy, as well as many national policy documents by DCMS, DfES and Resource, support the emphasis on learning. Definitions of and approaches to learning are changing. Learning is no longer seen as being at the receiving end of the transmission of knowledge and information, but rather as a process requiring the individuals' participation, enabling them to approach learning in a variety of different ways. A definition of learning, endorsed by Resource, is provided by the Campaign for Learning and sums up these changes. The definition states that:

'Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve increase in skills, knowledge, understanding, values and capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more'

The above definition encourages museums to place education and lifelong learning as an integral part of their organisation. Reading Museum Service has been described as a 'centre of excellence for learning' in the DfES good practice guide, 'Learning Through Culture' (2000, page 42). The validity of this comment is demonstrated throughout this policy document by the descriptions of the range of services provided for all ages, the professional consultation and advice undertaken for other organisations, and the provision of on-line services in the galleries, the classroom and through on-line mechanisms.

In order to comply with the museum mission statement, the corporate aims and objectives and the ten key themes of the Cultural Strategy, Reading Museum Service provides a range of learning activities, both formal and informal, and the policy statements concerning these learning services are described in the General Learning Policies and Sections two to five below.

General Learning Policies

1.1

Reading Museum Service will provide access to collections and resources for its users in order to help provide inspiration, motivation and information as part of the learning agenda

1.2

Access to collections will be provided through direct hands-on access to museum objects, viewing collections through gallery display and Perspex packed objects, web site interaction and on-line resources

1.3

The museum will offer services that underpin the requirements of the National Curriculum and are in line with Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) recommended schemes of work as appropriate within its formal learning programme

1.4

The service will not be constrained by its formal role. Learning opportunities will be offered in informal ways for people of all ages through the provision of a varied public programme and the availability of high quality permanent and temporary displays based on the use of real objects. A high priority is given to providing outreach services at non-museum venues and resources through the museum web site - www.readingmuseum.org.uk

1.5

In order to comply with the museum's strategic priority of lifelong learning for its users, the service will strive towards providing access for all, regardless of age, gender, social status, ethnic origin or ability. With growing recognition of the different learning styles people have and the contribution that creativity can make to learning and employment it is vital that the museum considers the population's needs in regard to these issues in the delivery of its services

1.6

The placing of learning at the heart of the organisation will enable the museum to continue to develop and to meet the increasingly diverse learning expectations of its users and will deliver the learning agenda through customer care services informed by the appropriate Reading Borough Council policies

1.7

The museum will maintain and develop appropriate links and networks with other education providers, local education authority personnel, schools and higher education colleges and universities to promote the learning services provided

1.8

The museum will work closely with Reading's Archives and Libraries, and will work in partnership with other organisations wherever appropriate

1.9

The museum will provide consultation sessions to regional, national and international museums to disseminate information about its learning services as requested

SECTION 2

Formal Learning

Formal learning encompasses all types of provision aimed at the formal education sector, including nursery, primary and secondary schools and further, continuing and higher education. The museum service can provide access to collections that can inspire, motivate and stimulate curiosity as well as inform. It is an extremely useful way of introducing pupils and students to 'real evidence'. Formal education sessions can also provide a physical and social context for learning, offer social experiences that can stimulate and support learning, provide activities that are memorable and appeal to all the senses and combine learning with enjoyment and entertainment.

Reading Museum Service offers a wide range of formal learning services for:

Foundation Years (ages 3-5)

Key stage 1 (ages 5-7)

Key stage 2 (ages 7-11)

Key stage 3 (ages 11-14)

Key stage 4 (ages 14 - 16)

Students and adult groups

These services include:

- museum staff-led sessions in the galleries and in school classrooms and other venues, supported by on-line resources (see policy points 2.1 to 2.14)
- a loans service for schools and educational groups that delivers across Berkshire and the surrounding borders and is available through on-line booking (see policy points 2.15 to 2.28)
- teacher/tutor services (see policy points 2.29 to 2.30)
- research placements and assistance, advice and guidance for undergraduate and post graduate students (see policy point 2.31)

Formal Learning Policies

Museum staff-led sessions in the galleries and in school classrooms and other venues:

2.1

In order to cater for the differing needs of schools and other organisations, the museum will offer two distinct types of museum staff-led sessions: gallery sessions, which are delivered within the museum, and museum classroom sessions, which are delivered in schools or other venues

2.2

Museum Gallery Sessions will be chosen to reflect the subject specialisms available within the museum galleries. They will be designed to allow students to learn more about the topic they are studying through hands-on activities with selected objects and interaction with museum staff. The session will be developed to suit the subject and key stages judged to be most appropriate to the collections and the National Curriculum and QCA documents, taking into account the outcomes from consultation and evaluation

2.3

The museum is committed to providing outreach sessions to enable users unable to visit the museum to be able to have access to both museum collections and trained museum staff. Museum Classroom Sessions will be developed:

- to explore subjects that are not currently reflected in the galleries but have strong links to the National Curriculum and museum collections not on display
- to allow key stages 3 and 4 to have access to collections and museum staff in appropriate subjects when museum visits within school hours are difficult to organise due to timetabling issues

This ensures that objects from a broader range of collections are accessible for schools, whilst still encouraging visits to the museum. Topics will be chosen to meet the needs of schools as identified through consultation and evaluation procedures

2.4

Each session is carefully devised to use real objects from the museum's collections to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum and to reflect current relevant Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) documents

2.5

All formal education sessions can be adapted for pupils and students with special educational needs

2.6

Details of all sessions will be included on the museum web site and supporting details available by request or to download

2.7

Each museum gallery session and classroom session has been costed at a group rate for a maximum of thirty-five pupils. Additional pupils may attend certain sessions with prior permission only, and at an extra cost per pupil. There is no charge for accompanying adults. Small groups with special educational needs are charged at an individual rate per pupil with a minimum price set at the cost rate of ten pupils. Charges have been set to reflect the additional staffing

required to provide these services, and a group charge instigated to allow users to book through the *Hands-On-Learning* membership scheme

2.8

Reading Museum Service will provide free lunch spaces for schools booking visits (paid or free) to the galleries when space is available

2.9

Gallery sessions are devised to run for two hours per session and classroom sessions for one hour per session (this may be adjusted on request at the discretion of museum staff at the time of booking)

2.10

Each Gallery session will be presented by one session leader, whilst off-site two session leaders will deliver sessions; all new session leaders recruited from April 2003 will be CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked to an Enhanced Disclosure Level

2.11

Visiting school children remain the responsibility of the teacher in charge at all times; children needing to leave their group for any reason must be supervised by the teacher or an adult from the group. Each visiting group is required to bring the recommended number of adults as specified in the booking literature

2.12

Pre-session visits are encouraged through the service entitled 'Phone a Friend', enabling teachers to book a free thirty minute introduction to the museum with a session leader. This visit provides an opportunity for teachers to view the gallery space and objects used in the session, as well as to gain a wider appreciation of the resources available through Reading Museum Service; museum staff may be booked to visit school premises free of charge to talk about the learning resources available for use

2.13

On-line resources will be provided to support users booking Gallery and Classroom Sessions and Loans Boxes. These resources will provide on-line pre and post visit activities and suggestions for using loans boxes. They will be registered with Curriculum on Line, enabling schools to use their e-learning credits to buy museum services

2.14

To ensure maximum flexibility for schools, both museum gallery sessions and museum classroom sessions are available as part of a membership option to the *Hands-on Learning* programme or at individual prices. For background information to the programme, see appendices

A loans service for schools and educational groups that delivers across Berkshire and the surrounding borders

2.15

Reading Museum Service is committed to developing the loans service as a regional centre of excellence (see reference in section 1), and to continue to act as a lead on loans in the region, developing user groups beyond Berkshire

2.16

The museum is committed to providing opportunities to allow access to collections for users outside of the museum building and without direct museum staff supervision

2.17

To ensure maximum flexibility for schools, the loans service is available as part of a membership option to the *Hands-on Learning* programme or at individual prices. The service will continue to work to reduce the costs of its learning services through fund raising initiatives, and will engage in partnerships wherever possible to achieve set targets. For background information to the programme, see appendices

2.18

Objects for handling within the *Hands-On Learning* programme must be selected carefully according to the collections management manual and loans service guidelines. The museum places a premium on direct handling of objects whenever possible, although some collections may be encased within Perspex, for the protection of the object and/or the user. Boxes of objects used for the *Hands-on Learning* programme will aim to contain a mix of objects for direct handling in addition to any objects packed in Perspex

2.19

All objects acquired for the loans service will be subject to the same rules of acceptance into the collections as any item put forward for consideration. The procedures in place since 1997 have been recognised officially within the 2002 - 2007 Acquisitions and Disposal policies (see section 3.4.3 'Significance for Learning & Creativity'). These procedures have had a major impact on the status of the collections used in the loans service, and as a result has raised the importance of the service as a whole

2.20

The museum service values providing users with direct access to good quality, provenanced objects from the accessioned collection whenever possible. Replica objects will not be used except as aids to understand incomplete, deteriorated or complex objects in the collection

2.21

Information notes will be included in each loans box; notes will aim to provide a short, object specific, paragraph for each item whenever possible and brief background information about the subject matter as appropriate. Notes will not be linked to the National Curriculum or QCA documents specifically as the boxes are aimed at all age groups

2.22

The museum will further develop the range of boxes that are linked to popular history themes within the National Curriculum and QCA documents through the acquisition of appropriate collections and partnership working

2.23

The lending of loans boxes is not restricted solely to schools; borrowing organisations should have an educational remit or learning purpose for the use of the box (users include schools, further education colleges, universities, other museums and heritage sites and corporations such as the BBC); individuals should not be loaned the boxes, with the exception of students from teacher training colleges who are under the supervision of a teacher in the school they are assigned to; loans boxes may be used to support museum activities in the holiday period, for story-time in the museum galleries and throughout the year in the Box Room Gallery

2.24

Suggested ways of using loans collections in the classroom will be included in the 'Using Objects' section in the Loans On-line site

2.25

Users of the loans service will have access to information through the Loans On-line facility (<http://schoolloans.readingmuseum.org.uk/>). Paper catalogues will only be issued on request

2.26

Insurance guidelines for users of the loans boxes are included in the current Service Level Agreement (SLA)

2.27

On-line resources will be provided to support users booking Hands-on-Learning services. The museum will increase learning opportunities available on-line and register with Curriculum on Line to enable schools to use their e-learning credits to buy museum services

2.28

The Hands-on Learning programme will be maintained and developed through a marketing plan that includes partnership working with local museums and other learning organisations

Teacher / tutor services

2.29

Teachers and tutors are welcome to book time to lead their own groups in the galleries free of charge; each group will be met by a member of staff who will welcome them to the museum

2.30

CPD/INSET days for teachers will be offered free of charge to schools signed up as members of the *Hands-On Learning* programme. These will provide advice for using loans collections in the classroom and introduce the resources and services that are available for their use. Sessions can be booked in the museum or on school premises

Research placements for students

2.31

The museum will provide a number of student placements throughout the year for Sixth Form school students, university undergraduates, especially those specialising in archaeology, and post-graduate museum studies courses or others as appropriate

SECTION 3

Informal Learning

Reading Museum Service offers opportunities for informal learning in a number of ways. These services include:

- Informal learning opportunities throughout the museum galleries (see **policy point 3.1**)
- An events and activities programme (see **policy points 3.2 to 3.4**)
- Web/online resources (see **policy point 3.5**)
- A talks programme (see **policy point 3.6**)
- Weekly museum surgery (see **policy point 3.7**)
- Access to general enquiries, advice and information on collections, publications (see **policy point 3.8 to 3.12**)
- A volunteer programme (see **policy point 3.13**)
- Work experience programme (see **policy point 3.14**)

Informal Learning Policies

Informal Learning opportunities throughout the museum galleries

3.1

All visitors to the museum galleries should have their learning needs catered for in a variety of ways to cater for differing learning styles. The galleries should aim to cover a range of learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) through the inclusion of different types of activities (either built into the gallery/exhibition design or through the Public Programme of events and activities) such as access to:

- handling objects
- oral histories
- video and audio clips
- information, games, quizzes presented on Touch screens
- virtual and physical interactives linked to aiding the understanding of the collections
- role play
- story telling
- tours
- Tots Trails
- staff interaction
- clear text both in print and on screen

Information regarding the learning opportunities within specific galleries is included in the appendices

An events and activities programme

3.2

The programme of events and activities will be agreed by the public programme workgroup following agreed guidelines

3.3

All events and activities are linked either to a national event, council initiatives, partnership projects, a current exhibition in the museum galleries or specific collections either on display in the galleries or from loan box collections

3.4

All parents/carers booking children into an event or activity where they will be unaccompanied must sign a permission form that gives their emergency contact telephone number, details of any health conditions or allergies and an opportunity to give/withdraw permission for photographs to be taken; museum staff should not accompany a lone child to other areas of the museum or to the facilities - they should always take at least two children together

Web/online resources

3.5

The museum will provide a website that provides opportunities for users to learn more about the museum's history, buildings, collections, shop and Public Programme through information and online resources. Visually impaired users will have access to the Bayeux tapestry pages through the provision of Bobby compliant screen readers. The service aims to increase learning activities available on-line as new opportunities arise

A talks programme

3.6

A talks programme for adult groups on themes relating to the collections and museum services will be provided with various categories of fees to reflect the place and time of the talk and a list of titles for users to choose from. Priority is given to groups visiting the museum or at venues in Reading

Weekly museum surgery

3.7

The museum will provide a free weekly 'museum surgery' to allow users to discuss their own objects or museum collections with museum staff; valuations will not be given

Access to general enquiries, advice and information on collections, publications

3.8

The museum staff will answer general public enquiries in person, by letter, over the telephone and e-mail, following Reading Borough Council's recommended procedures as appropriate

3.9

The service will provide advice and support on a regular basis to a range of museums; as part of the Curatorial Advice Scheme, support is provided for a number of museums in Berkshire; staff also respond to requests from International, National and Regional museums for advice and information about the museums' general services, including the Hands-on Learning programme

3.10

The museum will provide a series of information sheets linked to collections for visitor use available in the gallery and searchable on the web site

3.11

The museum will provide access, by appointment, to the museum store and research room. It will provide public open day events at the store for all users as agreed through the Public Programme diary of events

3.12

Museum staff contribute towards the informal learning agenda through the creation of a variety of material published both in print and online

Volunteer Programme

3.13

The museum will have a small number of volunteers working on the museum's collections on a regular basis, some of whom are members of The Friends of Reading Museum organisation

Work Experience Programme

3.14

The museum will provide a programme of work experience placements for 14-18 year olds in partnership with the Berkshire Central Education Business Partnership and other organisations as appropriate; each student will be provided with a varied, printed, programme of work for their placement at the start of their week by a member of the museum staff

SECTION 4

Social Inclusion

The national vision for museums as expressed in *Renaissance in the Regions* (Resource, 2001) has the promotion of access and inclusion as a priority:

'Museums must do more to unlock the full potential of collections and must become inclusive places for learning and inspiration'

One of Reading Museum Service's strategic priorities is lifelong learning. This is a theme which is echoed in Reading Borough Council's Cultural Strategy as well as many national policy documents by DCMS, DfES and Resource amongst others. With growing recognition of the different learning styles people have and the contribution that creativity can make to learning and employment, it is vital that the museum considers the population's needs in regard to these issues in the delivery of its services.

The service aims to tackle social exclusion by making its collections available to wider audiences. This will be partly achieved through the 'Hands-on-Learning' service that enables large numbers of school children throughout Berkshire and beyond to have access to the museum's collections in the museum, the classroom and on-line. The service operates as both an Outreach service and a venue to be visited. In addition to this and other core services, the service's Best Value Review Improvement Plan (2003) has identified a number of improvements that will address the social inclusion and diversity aspects of the museum's work and these are reflected in the policy points listed below.

There has been great investment by the service in its online presence. A wider audience can be reached through further developing methods of e-communication. The service has been utilising, and aims to further expand use of, the website and gallery and study terminals, providing computerised facilities to aid research. Kiosks in the galleries and study are fully accessible to all users. Accessibility to learning for all is considered throughout the museum; induction loops are provided with the audio-visual features in the galleries, tactile signage is provided throughout the building and each gallery has its own icon to help visitors find their way around. Many galleries provide opportunities of a tactile nature, details of which can be read in the appendices.

In order to contribute towards the aim of becoming socially inclusive to all users, the museum uses Reading Borough Council's Codes of Practice that follow the guidelines authorized by the Health and Safety Executive. In compliance with the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), Reading Museum

Service has carried out a number of audits of access. The procedures for, and results of these, are overseen by the museum's Health & Safety Workgroup. Policy points in connection with these are listed below.

Social Inclusion Policies:

Formal Learning (see also policy points 2.1; 2.3; 2.5; 2.7; 2.8; 2.10; 2.14; 2.21; 2.23; 2.27 - these all relate to Social Inclusion Policy)

4.1

The service will aim to maximise the use of the museum's formal learning services in areas of low educational attainment with priority being given to Reading Borough Council Schools

4.2

The museum will look at the feasibility of providing a Reminiscence Service that provides boxed objects on loan to establishments in the Reading and Wokingham districts. This service will aim to support and develop Reminiscence work in partnership with the Social Services departments within the two authorities

Informal Learning (see also policy points 3.1; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7; 3.8; 3.11; 3.14 - these all relate to Social Inclusion Policy)

4.3

The service will increase, consolidate and reinforce existing learning resources available on the web site. It will expand and develop new areas of e-learning potential through the use of museum collections

Health & Safety

4.4

Risk Assessments are written to cover the safety of visitors, staff and participants in all learning activities

4.5

Risk Assessments are written to cover the safety of users of loans boxes at outside venues

Child Protection - see policy points 2.10; 2.11 and 3.4

SECTION 5

Evaluation of Learning

Evaluation of gallery and classroom sessions

To ensure that Reading Museum Service provides learning services of the highest quality, each formal education session is subject to a process of continuous evaluation. Evaluation forms are given to each teacher, encouraging feedback on booking arrangements, the content and quality of the session, as well as the standard of museum facilities. This process is dependent on the participation of teachers completing and returning the forms. If areas of weakness are identified, improvements are implemented via Reading Museum Services' workgroup process, enabling session leaders to contribute to and gain ownership of the development of the session. Any changes put in place following discussion of evaluation data are then also subject to focused evaluation from both teachers and the session leaders to ensure satisfaction.

Major evaluation study

Loans Unlocked was an important research project funded by the Department for Education and Skills that examined the operation of the loans service and how loans are used in the classroom. This evaluation provides an insight into the development needed to broaden access to museum collections and empower teachers and museums to work together in a dynamic and innovative way. Before the start of the project Reading Museum Service had begun to redevelop and reshape its loans service, taking the lead among museums with existing services. However there was a demonstrated need for development in packaging and presentation of museum objects for loan and adapting associated information to meet the needs of the National Curriculum. The rationale, objectives and outcomes for the project can be read on the museum's website at: www.readingmuseum.org.uk/handsonlearning

Evaluation Policies

5.1

All gallery and classroom sessions will be evaluated by means of a questionnaire form handed out to each group at the end of their session

5.2

On receipt of completed evaluation forms, any weaknesses will be identified and improvements implemented via the workgroup process as appropriate

5.3

The outcomes from the major evaluation study '*Loans Unlocked*' will be used to inform the future development of the loans service

Appendices

These appendices provide background information to the learning services provided by Reading Museum Service. Information about the Formal Education services provided includes Museum Gallery Sessions, Museum Classroom Sessions and The Loans Service. Details about the amalgamation of these three services into the *Hands-On Learning* programme is also provided. Further information about the Informal Learning provided within specific galleries in the museum is given.

Museum Gallery Sessions

These are chosen to reflect the subject specialisms available within the museum galleries. This enables students to have the maximum opportunity to experience and observe objects relating to their study topic. There are currently five museum gallery sessions available for groups to book. Each session lasts 2 hours and is led by a member of the museum staff who is specially trained to lead sessions using objects from the collections. After welcoming the class to the museum, the session leader presents a short introduction to the topic, using careful questioning skills to gauge the level of knowledge of the pupils. Each session leader is then able to adapt the content of their introduction, ensuring that all information is delivered at an appropriate level. Pupils are also introduced to basic principles of collections care and the safe handling of museum objects. Following the introduction, the class divides into small groups, usually five, each led by an accompanying adult or teacher from the school, to explore hands-on activities throughout the gallery. Handling collections housed in specially designed trolleys and objects in the galleries are used extensively during these activities to engage the pupils' imagination and stimulate discovery about the topic. The session leader retains overall supervision of the gallery; this ensures smooth rotation between the activities and that the maximum learning experience is gained from the visit.

Museum Classroom Sessions

The development of museum classroom sessions has enabled Reading Museum Service to respond to requests from teachers for formal education sessions that cover a wider subject range. Each museum classroom session is carefully selected to explore subjects that are not currently reflected in the galleries. This ensures that objects from a broader range of collections are accessible for schools, whilst still encouraging visits to the museum. Each session lasts one hour and is led by two members from the museum staff who are specially trained to lead sessions using objects from the collections. There are currently five museum classroom sessions available for groups to book.

Introduction to the loans service and loans On-line

Reading Museum Service began its schools loan service in 1911 and by 1933, Reading Education Committee gave £5 to the service, which then consisted of 200 collections. In 1946 the first School Liaison Officer was appointed. In 1950 Berkshire County Council began to fund the schools service and this enabled it to be set up as a centrally funded service to Berkshire schools. The service moved to premises with a workshop at Yeomanry House, Castle Street in 1964 where it continued to operate until it was relocated to the Museum of Reading building in 1996.

From 1997 the service had to adapt to a new climate of unitary authorities, grant-maintained schools and delegated budgets. In response, the director of the museum service filed a report to Reading Borough Council for decision borough wide. It described the loans service and the options for future joint funding arrangements. The local government re-organisation resulted in the creation of six unitary authorities across Berkshire with whom the Museum Loans Service has worked in partnership. One of these, Wokingham District Council, decided not to participate in the proposed joint arrangement facility and withdrew its financial support for the service. This resulted in Wokingham schools liaising directly with Reading Museum Service which in turn invoices the schools directly for the services they choose to use. The remaining unitary authorities continued to support the loans service through an annual payment that enabled all their schools to use the service. However, between 1997 and 2002, the Fair Funding regulations have required authorities to release the budgets for a growing percentage of their services direct to their schools. This action has resulted in the gradual delegation of the budget for the museum loans service to schools by all the unitary authorities. By April 2002 all schools across Berkshire using the loans service funded it from within their own budgets. However the authorities still maintain contact with the museum loans service in a variety of ways, including sending a Client Officer to a quarterly libraries and museum meeting.

The loans collection consists of approximately 1,700 boxed museum objects, both real and models, which are taken from the museum to the classroom. The loans are used to support subject teaching across the curriculum, and teachers and school staff can order boxes by post, fax, email, telephone or on-line (www.readingmuseum.org.uk). *Loans On-Line* enables all website users to browse the collections, and schools that subscribe to the service are given a password that allows them to check availability and book their choices up to two years in advance. Delivery and collection of boxes to schools is organised every half term by courier service and schools are notified of the dates in advance. Schools joining the scheme are required to sign a service level agreement detailing services available and obligations.

Hands-on -Learning with Reading Museum Service

The Hands-on Learning programme was devised in direct response to the changing economic situation stimulated by Local Government reorganisations. At the Client Officer group meeting on the 9th July 2001, members asked if Reading Museum Service could look at providing a more flexible service for schools allowing room for greater choice in the fee structure. At the same time, RMS staff knew that in an 'open-market' situation, a strategy for effective marketing and a flexible scheme that would be attractive to schools was needed to ensure the ongoing success of the services' learning services, especially the Loans Service. After meeting with client officers for each of the authorities and discussing ideas with museum staff, local teachers and the Head of the Education Library Service, who already operated a 'menu-type' programme for his service, work began on producing a flexible 'menu-choice' option scheme. Reading Museum Service was unable to lower the amount payable for schools to sign up to the loans service as this would have resulted in the service becoming unviable. However, many schools used Reading's gallery and classroom sessions, which are based on handling and learning from museum collections, and generally pay for these by recharging their pupils' parents. The *Hands-on Learning* programme, effective from 1 April 2002, takes advantage of this by offering a menu for teachers to choose from; they can still order and receive a standard number loans boxes per half term for an annual payment (or sign up to a higher number of boxes at a more expensive, but competitive, rate) or they have a number of other options that combine smaller numbers of loans boxes with gallery or classroom sessions, or simply a range of gallery and classroom sessions for the same fee. This enables the school to claim part of the fee back from parents, thus paying a smaller amount out of their school budgets. A new brochure was created laying out the 'menu' and details about the service for teachers to consult. An added bonus to the scheme is that Reading Museum Service now has an integrated education service that can plan its outreach work in the form of offering loans boxes alongside its other services, previously offered in isolation of each other.

Informal Learning in the Museum Galleries

All visitors to the museum have their learning needs catered for in various ways throughout the galleries:

Box Room Gallery

The Box Room is an exciting, interactive gallery that provides the opportunity to handle real objects from the museum's extensive collections as well as discovering many of them virtually. It serves as an introduction to the whole museum. The museum's loans service is based in this gallery and visitors can see the loan boxes that give the gallery its name on open storage. Visitors wanting to learn more can ask to handle items from any of the loans boxes available in the gallery. This service is facilitated through making a booking by e-mail. The gallery is staffed by assistants who are trained to enable visitors to gain the most out of the objects on display and who will answer questions to the best of their abilities, or suggest other ways in which individuals can carry out their own self directed learning

Reading: People and Place Gallery

The Reading: People and Place Gallery allows visitors to find out how Reading people lived in the past and how both famous and ordinary men and women made the town we know today. Informal learners can gain information through interactive displays, listening to oral history, watching a video about the history of Reading and experiencing a rich mix of real objects including the huge seventeenth-century gates from the original Oracle workhouse.

Bayeux Tapestry Gallery

The Bayeux Tapestry Gallery displays Britain's Victorian copy of the Bayeux Tapestry. This faithful replica was made in 1885 by skilled Victorian women embroiderers. The gallery also explores the impact of the Norman conquest and the history of Saxon migration and Viking raids on the area over the preceding four hundred years. Visitors wanting to learn more can join in a free half-hour tour of the gallery during which the tour guide will relate the story told by the tapestry and answer questions as required. Learning material in the form of leaflets and books can be purchased from the museum shop and additional help for those with sight or hearing impairments are available on request. Learners have the opportunity to find out more about this subject through the website. Reading Museum Service has created the UK's official Bayeux Tapestry website which is fully compatible with screen readers for visually impaired users.

Huntley & Palmers Gallery

The Huntley & Palmers Gallery tells the story of Reading's world famous biscuit makers. Self directed learners can discover how Huntley & Palmers pioneered

the mass production of biscuits and why Reading became known as the 'Biscuit Town'. Visitors can see what factory life was like for Huntley & Palmers' thousands of workers through oral history, photographs and historic film, including the earliest surviving film of a British factory. Learning in this gallery is enhanced through the availability of a number of interactives aimed at helping visitors understand many aspects of life in the factory and its impact on the wider world. Learners can find out more about the subject through the museum's Huntley and Palmers website.

John Madejski Art Gallery

The John Madejski Art Gallery houses changing exhibitions of art works, from the museum's collection or on loan. Some of the exhibitions include interactive games and activities to stimulate the imagination of learners wanting to experience more involvement with the works on display. All exhibitions have accessible text, and the gallery is staffed by assistants who can help learners by supplying extra information and guidance when required.

For visitors wishing to extend their knowledge further, the museum's extensive collection of works of art on paper is housed in the John Madejski Art Gallery. Visitors may view these works by appointment - a booking can be taken and museum staff will help visitors to use the available collection.

The Silchester Gallery

The Silchester Gallery and Annexe explores the life of people living in the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum at Silchester in Hampshire. Front of house staff on duty in this gallery are at liberty to use the gallery handling collection with families who are particularly interested in the subject and wish to find out more for themselves. The gallery has an interactive trail to encourage younger visitors to explore the collections more fully. Many items in the museum shop reflect the collections on display in the Silchester Gallery and can add to the learning experience for many visitors.

Green Space Gallery

The Green Space Gallery traces the development of Reading's environment, landscape and wildlife, using hundreds of geology and natural history specimens. This gallery includes features that help the general visitor understand more about these subjects - a selection of objects can be handled and many of these have interactive elements to promote understanding of the material on display. Signage in this gallery is also provided in Braille and there are a number of 'picture signs' provided in carved wood. The gallery includes a 'book corner' for visitors to use to find out more about the subjects explored in the gallery. Informal learners can find out what was at Reading before people existed, how Reading's landscape and environment developed and what animals and plants live around Reading today.

Windows Gallery and Atrium

Both the Windows Gallery and the Atrium allow visitors to see examples of art and artefacts from many different ages. Most importantly, these are spaces that allow the informal learner to pause, reflect and relax during their visit to the museum.

Exhibitions Gallery

This gallery is a flexible space that can host exhibitions, events, activities, corporate members lunches, conferences, meetings and performances. Its flexibility allows the museum to meet a wide range of the learning needs of both individual visitors and those in booked groups.

The Study

The study is a quiet area for members of the public to carry out research and other creative projects. Visitors can book this space to use the museum's database and examine objects from the collection that are not on display. Microscopes, computers, public access to the collection database and supervised access to primary documentation for the whole collection are provided.

END