

# *Delivering Diversity; Promoting Participation*

## *Conference Proceedings*

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***Delivering Diversity; Promoting Participation  
Conference Proceedings***

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# Preface

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London, September 1999. Imperial College is bustling with delegates from all over the world, buzzing with ideas. There is millennial optimism in the UK museum world, as it proudly hosts the annual CIDOC conference in partnership with **mda**. After all, here is a government minister opening our event, speaking of museums as being at the heart of the learning agenda and of information and communications technologies being a crucial driving force.

Now firmly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are seeing the fruits of many of the initiatives presented at *Delivering Diversity Promoting Participation*. Yet this conference did much more than present us with the known. It challenged us to question what we would find beyond the cusp of the millennium, seeking out the hard questions to ask: What are museums and technology all about exactly? Who are our audiences and what do they really want? And if we can answer such questions, how do we get it all to work?

If you were fortunate enough to attend the conference you will be reminded when reading these proceedings why it was such a stimulating event. If you were not, then you have some treats in store....

Louise Smith  
Director, **mda**



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# Introduction

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*Alan Howarth, CBE  
Minister for the Arts  
Department of Culture,  
Media and Sport*

I am delighted to be here today and honoured to open this joint **mda/CIDOC** Conference. It is fitting that these two bodies have worked together to invite a truly international audience to consider the theme **Delivering Diversity - Promoting Participation**. With speakers from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Italy, Netherlands, Russia, Tunisia, USA, Zambia as well as the UK, the conference programme itself has a diversity and participation which demonstrate that the world of museums is looking to the future with energy and excitement.

As a representative of your host nation, I also hope that many of you will have taken the opportunity the conference offered for study tours over the past two days, allowing you to experience first hand some of the vast array of treasures we are privileged to hold in our London museums and galleries.

## ***Museums as a means of promoting international understanding***

These are indeed exciting times for all those of us who have the good fortune to work in the world of museums and galleries. Locally, nationally and internationally we are all looking at new ways to interpret and present our collections to give access to the widest possible audiences - both real and virtual - across the spectrum of age, ability and interest. Increasingly, too, we have to take account of the possibility of global audiences.

The challenge for all of us here is to find new ways to respond to this changing world; to recognise the new demands and opportunities this presents to museums and galleries and the way they offer their collections.

The challenge is to use and adapt the highly complex tool of ICT so that seeking out the treasures contained in our museums and galleries becomes ever easier. The 'end user' does not need or indeed may not want to know, what modern miracle lies behind an Internet search, the transmission of three dimensional moving objects or virtual links between museums and galleries worldwide to bring forward the complete works of an artist regardless of where they are deposited.

The task is to exploit these possibilities and make it all easy. It is a conundrum many sectors are grappling with. It is certainly an issue in digital broadcasting, it affects business with the development of e-commerce and, as we move towards our commitment to deliver 25% of government services electronically by 2002, it is also important for Government.

Alongside these new means of delivery, lies the traditional and still vital role of museums, galleries, libraries and archives as expressions of civilised society's desire to protect and learn from our culture and heritage and use our understanding of it to shape our future. In a world which is rapidly changing - and shrinking - the collections in our museums and galleries help us to identify ourselves and understand each other as global partners. They are a crystal ball for gazing into the past and making sense of the present and future.

## ***Government response***

We in Government are firmly behind our nation's museums and galleries and our desire to see their collections open to all is well known. My Department has recently undertaken a number of measures to broaden access. We have allowed the introduction of free entry for children from 1 April to all museums and galleries directly funded by the Department. We have published new standards for access *Museums for the Many*. And we have recently published a report on the role of the arts and sport in overcoming social exclusion - part of the work of the Government's Social Exclusion Unit, which aims to reach those who may for various reasons be outside the mainstream of our society and find its benefits harder to come by.

## ***National Grid for Learning***

2002 is also a significant date for education. Two years ago now we published *Connecting the Learning Society* in which we set a goal for all schools to be linked via a National Grid for Learning to each other and to all our learning institutions whether libraries, colleges, universities, museums or galleries. The National Grid for Learning will also support the development of the University for Industry which will be launched next April with a nationwide network of learning centres enabling all adults to participate in lifelong learning in a style and at a level which meets their needs. In many ways the success of the National Grid for Learning will be judged by the standard of the electronic content it contains. The part that libraries, museums and galleries have to play in enriching the content contained on the Grid is clear to us all.

## Museums as educators

Of course, the part that museums play in educating individuals and societies goes beyond interpretation of collections, and is often much more immediate and active. The British Government is committed to raising education standards right across the board. We want to embed a culture of learning throughout society. If we are to do this, we must look beyond the boundaries of schools, colleges and universities. My Department recently commissioned Dr David Anderson to produce a second edition of his influential report *A Common Wealth - Museums in the Learning Age* and I commend it to those of you who have not already read it. It ably describes what excellent fertile ground museums and galleries are to grow the desire to learn in all of us. Being able to experience real objects helps children to bring to life and understand more fully what they are taught, and can attract those who are otherwise reluctant to learn. For all of us museums and galleries bring a greater understanding and appreciation of the context in which we live. But they also permit a more holistic style of learning using not just the intellect but the senses.

We are also bringing new sources of funding on stream to support the developing role of museums and galleries, libraries and archives in education. Funding from the National Lottery, through the New Opportunities Fund for programmes for out-of-school-hours activity, for digitisation of educational and learning material to be delivered on our National Grid for Learning and for an initiative to enhance Community Access to Lifelong Learning all have relevance to museums. These programmes together are worth nearly £500 million. My Department has worked closely with the Department for Education and Employment on a £2.5m programme to encourage schools and museums to work together in support of the National Curriculum. We have announced the results of a £15m fund for the Designated Museums and we have just launched

two further Challenge Funds to support education work and ICT development.

## Collaboration/24 Hour Museum

ICT will, of course, be an important tool in museums' plans to enhance their educational activities. With this in mind, I am very pleased that one of this year's indisputable success stories has been the 24 Hour Museum. My Department has been delighted to support this first national museum on the web. It provides information on all of the nation's museums and in time will develop to enable more complex searches to be undertaken and contain detailed information on the content of collections. This would not have happened without a partnership between the **mda** and the Campaign for Museums working with and on behalf of all the museums in the country. I am sure that those involved will not mind my quoting a recent editorial in the *Museums Journal* which stated that the 24 Hour Museum is a "staple of museums' strategic thinking in the 21st century".

## Netful of Jewels

I would like also to draw particular attention to the report *Netful of Jewels* produced recently by the National Museums Directors Conference working with the **mda** and the Museums and Galleries Commission which makes the case and outlines the vision for a virtual cultural network. The prospects that this opens up are enormous. Whilst nothing will substitute for real visits to museums to see real exhibits, the opportunity to examine and enjoy national and international treasures at the touch of a button opens up a whole new world of possibilities. The serious researcher will have access to data previously only possible through detailed catalogue searches. Teachers will have a new and ever changing means of illustrating their teaching with examples. All of us, including those

who may be unable to make real visits to museums, will have ready access to the treasure trove contained in them. I am delighted that the **mda/MGC/NMDC** partnership will continue to the next stage of the report.

## Public Library ICT Network

The partners will, I am sure, draw on the ground breaking work already undertaken by the Library and Information Commission, in developing the framework for the Public Libraries ICT Network to be established through the New Opportunities Fund streams I mentioned above, linking all public libraries to the National Grid for Learning by 2002. The important work going on in the archives sector through the AtoA programme will also be helpful.

I don't intend to say much about these library and archive initiatives as I am conscious that Matthew Evans, Chairman of the LIC, will shortly give you his keynote address, and that later today you will be hearing from Chris Batt, the Chief Network Development Adviser for the libraries network. Matthew Evans particularly has played a pivotal role in the initiation and development of the 'New Library' concept with and for the entire library community, and I should like to use this platform to congratulate him on his appointment as Chairman designate for the new Museums, Libraries and Archives Commission which comes into being from 1 April 2000. I know he will bring to its work with museums and galleries the same enthusiasm and intelligence he shows in his Chairmanship of the LIC, and that under his leadership MLAC will quickly establish itself as leader and key link for the sectors it brings together.

## **MLAC**

'Developing diversity and promoting participation' could be used as one of the goals for MLAC. Its task will be to give strategic direction to the excellent work already going on the world of museums, libraries and archives and to show the way forward, through collaborative working between each of the professions, to the benefit of the users of each of the services. ICT development within museums, libraries and archives will be of central importance to MLAC. I have touched upon the progress already being made by each of the sectors. I hope that MLAC will help to bring all of these initiatives together under the umbrella of a cross sectoral strategy for ICT. I wish Matthew and all who will be involved in MLAC in the future well.

## **European Museums Information Institute**

Continuing this theme of collaboration, I am delighted to hear that today the European Museums' Information Institute is being launched with unanimous support from all 15 EC Member states. This will establish a point of competence in each member state to spread best practice on information management and ICT development in museums. I am pleased to know that **mda** will take on this role for the UK.

International cooperation between museums is becoming ever more important. Within Europe, the EU is a major source of funding for cooperative projects. Apart from the obvious sources such as the new Culture 2000 programme, there are rather larger funds from which museums can benefit under the EU's 5th Framework Programme for research and development. Areas of interest include making the information society more user friendly and innovative strategies for the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage.

## **mda/CIDOC Conference**

After this necessarily brief run through the policies we are pursuing to realise the full potential of museums and galleries for learning and leisure, I will end as I began, by congratulating you on a truly international example of such activity - this conference. I thank **mda** and CIDOC for bringing us all together in a very tangible expression of the benefits to be gained by sharing our cultural heritage and developing our understanding of how we do that in this technological age. I wish you all a very successful conference.

