



Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* Special Initiative

The *OUR MUSEUM* organisations  
A summary of the journeys

Bristol Culture

## Introduction

*Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners* was a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative, established in 2012 and finishing in early 2016. The overall aim was to influence the museum and gallery sector to:

- Place community needs, values and active collaboration at the core of museum and gallery work
- Involve communities and individuals in decision-making processes
- Ensure that museums and galleries play an effective role in developing community skills and the skills of staff in working with communities

This was to be done through facilitation of organisational change in specific museums and galleries already committed to active partnership with communities. *Our Museum* offered a collaborative learning process through which institutions and communities shared experiences and learned from each other as critical friends.

In early 2012 nine museums and galleries were selected to join *Our Museum* from participants in an earlier consultation and research period.<sup>1</sup> The organisations reflected key differences in the wider sector in scale, character and location. Their different starting-points, different challenges and priorities and the different kinds of resources at their disposal, were recognised by the Foundation. The organisations selected were: Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales; Belfast Exposed; Bristol Culture; Glasgow Museums; Hackney Museum; Museum of East Anglian Life; The Lightbox; Ryedale Folk Museum; Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.<sup>2</sup>

Each organisation responded to the *Our Museum* Outcomes and Indicators of Success framework and identified 'strategic change objectives' it anticipated would be the focus of its work during the programme. They also identified the members of their *Our Museum* 'engagement team': five people from the museum/gallery, ideally including the chief officer, and five people from community partners to work together collaboratively. The museums and galleries participating in *Our Museum* experimented with a wide range of approaches to achieving their strategic change objectives and create organisational change.

This document assesses the progress of Bristol Culture and the challenges it faced in creating organisational change. It is a supplement to the main evaluation report by Gerri Moriarty and Sally Medlyn: *Museums Galleries Communities-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> The research was published as: Lynch, B. 2011. *Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A collaborative investigation into engagement and participation in 12 museums and galleries in the UK*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation

<sup>2</sup> The Museum of East Anglian Life and Ryedale Folk Museum were funded for two of the three years of the programme. After they left the *Our Museum* programme the Foundation supported them with organisational review and business planning.

## The four *Our Museum* Outcomes and Indicators of Success

### **Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs**

Museums and galleries understand their role within their localities; they are effectively informed of and respond to, the range of their communities' needs and values and are aware of and initiate opportunities for partnerships with communities and other sectors to meet local needs

### **Outcome 2 Community agency**

Communities are sustainably at the core of all the values, strategies, structures and work of museums and galleries: actively and regularly participating and collaborating in dialogue and decision-making about the work of the museum/gallery

### **Outcome 3 Capability building**

Museums and galleries play an effective role in developing community skills, capabilities and creativity: preparing and helping people to be engaged in their communities, to articulate their voices, to find employment or volunteering opportunities in the heritage sector and elsewhere; and supporting staff to learn how to work with communities

### **Outcome 4 Reflection**

Museums and galleries embed reflective practice into their work: internally, with community partners and across the sector, to ensure on-going reflection, dialogue and openness to challenge, alternative values and working methods

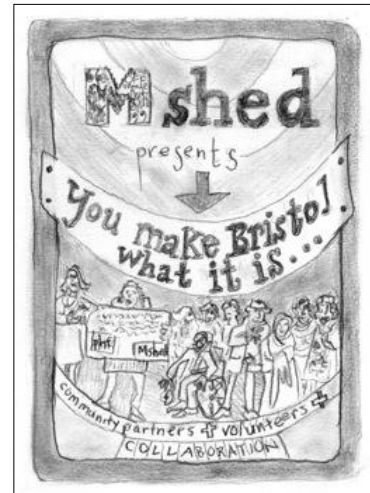
Indicators of Success for each outcome set out key assumptions about organisations committed to active partnership with communities: core values; kinds of leadership; ways of working; the nature and purpose of partnerships which might help inform policy and support delivery; how community and staff capacity building might help to deliver all outcomes; what good practice in this area might look like; and the critical role of reflection and dialogue in the work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Outcomes and Indicators of Success are set out in full on page 28 of the main report

## Bristol Culture

This summary assesses the progress of Bristol Culture and the challenges it faced in creating organisational change against the four *Our Museum* outcomes; Rooted in Local Needs, Community Agency, Capability and Reflection. It has been written by the *Our Museum* evaluators Sally Medlyn and Gerri Moriarty and is a supplement to the main evaluation report which contains further details of the outcomes framework: *Museums and Galleries-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.



**Bristol Culture** operates seven venues across the City of Bristol. It is part of Bristol City Council's Place Directorate and of Bristol Culture and is funded by the local authority, Arts Council England, and a range of income-generating activities. During the course of the *Our Museum* programme, it experienced a major service re-structure and changes in senior leadership.

### Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs: Refreshing exhibition content, amended Job Descriptions

Bristol Culture has consistently seen its purpose as addressing the specific economic, social and cultural context of Bristol and its communities – past and present - and the wider strategic vision for the city's future. It initially proposed a four-strand approach to organisational change, intended to target all core service areas and involve as many staff as possible. The *Our Museum* programme began by, for example, researching best practice elsewhere, evaluating its own participatory practice and training needs, and exploring new ways of working with Bristol's Neighbourhood Areas, assisted by a community partner.

In Year 2, its *Our Museum* engagement team decided to focus its approach to organisational change through a single project, noting that initial work, which had had the advantage of involving more staff in a wide range of programmes, '*had some disadvantages in that project management and evaluation were more difficult to control, and the breadth of the work meant the concept of Our Museum became looser.*' The new project involved sixty diverse local communities, museum volunteers and museum visitors in refreshment of an exhibition at one of Bristol Culture's sites, M Shed, entitled *You Make Bristol*. Bristol Culture learning staff had decided the content of the original exhibition, with some time limited input from an advisory group, the People's Panel. The refreshed exhibition involved communities in proposing and deciding on content and in writing the accompanying text, with support from a Bristol Culture curator. When a proposal to tour *You Make Bristol* proved unfeasible, a community partner organised pop up shows in two outdoor locations in the city.

Bristol Culture's restructuring offered an opportunity to include a standard paragraph about *Our Museum* principles in all job descriptions across the service. For example, the role of the Young People's Officer is described as: *'To assist with the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the young people's programme, working pro-actively with communities and creative organisations and professionals and ensuring that the principles of Our Museum are embedded in the programme.'* Appraisal and work programmes were also amended to include relevant goals.

The new Head of Service initiated a 'Meet the Culture Team' event, attended by 180 people from across Bristol's cultural services and representatives of 46 external organisations. This was intended to encourage dialogue and joint working.

### **Outcome 2 Community Agency: The HUB, co-production models**

Bristol Culture set up an *Our Museum* engagement team, which began its work with an open and shared dialogue about what change might look like; volunteers and community partners suggested, for example, that there might need to be more freedom for communities to decide on content in the context of collaborative exhibition development and that the balance between community perspectives and historic/academic perspectives in exhibitions might also need to be addressed.

Membership of the engagement team was widened to increase ethnic diversity amongst the group and involve more members with experience of strategic community development and community networks in Bristol. The engagement team decided to adopt a new name to symbolise the group's work: the Hub. It had *'begun to think of the museum as becoming a hub to host important city wide discussions, for example, about race and equality, and as a place which could help people to develop new skills and build their confidence as well as enabling people to recognise and value their own existing skill'* although this concept was never fully explored. It was difficult to establish a clear strategic rationale and shared purpose for the group and although individuals made valuable contributions to the work being undertaken, membership was inconsistent.

In Year 2, M Shed presented *Spaces of Dissent*, an event coordinated by one of the community partners on the *Our Museum* engagement team; through film, artefacts, presentations and storytelling, the panel and participants considered the impact of dissent led by some of the city's more marginalised communities. The event illustrated one model of co-production, linking Bristol Culture, community partners and the University of Bristol.

In Year 3, Bristol Culture staff proposed an exhibition on the theme of death, suggesting this both as a focus for co-production with community partners and a way to involve more staff from the curatorial, programming and design teams.

Community partners and representatives of different groups, all with an interest in the theme of death, such as Age UK Bristol, the Bristol Secular Society and The Bristol Multi-Faith Forum, took part in a series of sessions with staff from collections,

learning, communities / access and volunteering teams to discuss the exhibition, its themes and its relationship to the *Our Museum* programme. Written terms of reference setting out the mutual obligations and expectations of the museum and of community partners were agreed. Whilst acknowledged as not fully collaborative, Bristol Culture saw the process as a *'first step towards co-production and a change of mind set within the organisation.'* A staff member reflected – given that the theme of the exhibition was identified by the museum before contact with communities - that the process was a limited success *'as Our Museum principles were applied late, rather than being the wellspring of the exhibition.'*

As the *Our Museum* programme comes to an end, Bristol Culture has decided to disband the Hub; this is attributed to lack of funding and the pressure of other commitments on members. Some individual Hub members intend to continue to be involved with Bristol Culture, for example, by commenting on exhibition proposals or joining recruitment panels. A 'Youth Panel' is to be recruited later in 2016.

### **Outcome 3 Capability Building: Volunteer development**

An important strand of Bristol Culture's *Our Museum* programme concerned its volunteers – a large internal community. An *Our Museum* funded Volunteer Coordinator was responsible for delivery of a Volunteer Plan and an *Our Museum* funded Volunteer Apprentice was also appointed. The focus of this work was described as the *'re-launch of the Volunteer programme to create shared values, a thriving, mutually beneficial volunteer culture and efficient processes and systems.'* There was an intention to *'empower volunteers into increased decision-making roles at the heart of the Service.'* A community partner, who was also a volunteer at Bristol Culture, worked on this with staff and a volunteer team was set up for the first time.

Moving Forward, an employability programme aimed at unemployed people was developed in partnership with Way 2 Work, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College and ss Great Britain Museum to support volunteers into employment with transferable skills and an accredited qualification. Links have been established with key organisations working with unemployed people in the city and with the city's Business in the Community: Ready for Work group. Opportunities for volunteers were developed across all Bristol Culture teams and they began to shape museum events. Recruitment processes also changed to enable volunteers to apply for posts that would previously have been open only to museum staff. Supported placements have been developed, aimed at young unemployed people to diversify the volunteer profile, and new roles created.

In Year 2, staff from collections, marketing, performance and front of house went on a tour of the multicultural neighbourhoods of St Paul's and Easton to increase their understanding of the diverse communities that make up Bristol and made a short film to share the experience with other staff. Social media training took place and the museum's content management system was adapted to add community information so that future community contacts would be cross-referenced to their associated

event or object. This has enabled staff to map which communities Bristol Culture were or were not engaging with and to plan for the future. An audit of current training practice and needs has taken place and Visitor Services staff have learned directly from people with learning difficulties how to make written information more accessible, and how to offer help appropriately to people with learning difficulties.

Bristol Culture's *Service Plan 2015 -18* includes staff and volunteers development strands to embed *Our Museum* principles within service practice.

#### **Outcome 4 Reflection: Strengthening internal systems**

Bristol Culture had identified a desire to '*embed a 'learning by doing' approach to work using 'analyse, plan, do, review' which integrates research and reflection*' as an important element of its *Our Museum* programme. From the outset, staff and community partners engaged openly in discussion about ideas and concerns, for example, about equal engagement between staff and community partners, concerns about staff becoming overwhelmed and de-moralised by the complexities of community agency and decision-making and the need to create new opportunities for volunteers.

The Hub experimented with several methods for reflection, such as individual hand-written journals and a shared journal. Members decided that one of the most effective tools was one of the simplest; they included a regular ten-minute space for shared reflection at the end of meeting agendas.

Bristol Culture's new management team have changed internal systems to improve communications, rationalise meeting structures, clarify internal decision making processes and increase information flow across the organisation. Formal reflection is now included as part of the staff appraisal system.

