



Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* Special Initiative

The *OUR MUSEUM* organisations
A summary of the journeys

Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum of Wales

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.¹ 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.²

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 Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales 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.

¹ 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

² 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.³

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

Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

This summary assesses the progress of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales (Amgueddfa Cymru) 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 Galleries Communities-Active Partners-Mutual Benefit: An evaluation of the Our Museum Special Initiative*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation. June 2016.



Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales (Amgueddfa Cymru) describes itself as a family of seven museums located throughout Wales. The focus of its bid to join the *Our Museum* programme was the St Fagans National History Museum, which houses over forty original buildings from different historical periods. Amgueddfa Cymru is governed by a Board of Trustees constituted in accordance with its Royal Charter and Statutes. Amgueddfa Cymru is funded by the Welsh Government as a Welsh Government Sponsored Body. The policies and priorities of the Welsh Government provide the overall context for its work.

Outcome 1 Rooted in Local Needs: Involving volunteers from more diverse backgrounds

A concern to make connections between the work of museums, their localities and social need informs the Welsh Government's Museums Strategy for Wales (2010-2015). This was reflected in Amgueddfa Cymru's *Our Museum* application: 'As a publicly-funded organisation, we have a social responsibility to provide enabling experiences with a beneficial social outcome. We need to re-establish our relationship with civil society.' It decided to focus its work on volunteering, 'something we felt we were particularly bad at' and on one site, Saint Fagans. At the application stage of *Our Museum*, Amgueddfa Cymru was also developing a round 2 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a major capital re-development project. The success of the latter application was confirmed during the *Our Museum* programme.

Before submitting a final application, Amgueddfa Cymru invited all the voluntary organisations consulted about its HLF bid to a meeting to discuss their potential involvement in the *Our Museum* initiative. An early suggestion from staff to focus on volunteering enabled people to quickly identify whether or not the proposed area of work matched their expertise and own organisational agenda. The meeting led to a

shared understanding of the purpose of partnership for both the voluntary organisations (who later became community partners and joined the *Our Museum* engagement team) and Amgueddfa Cymru.

Community partners included local, regional and national agencies; their work involved people who were not represented in the volunteer profile at St Fagans, for example, homeless people, unemployed people, disabled people, and young people. Other organisations were invited to join the engagement team at a later stage, when particular expertise was needed. Some agencies had worked previously with the museum and some had not. Community partners included, for example, Diverse Cymru, Drug Aid, New Link Wales, Quest (supported employment), The Wallich (homelessness), VCS Cymru, Wales Council for Voluntary Action; all the organisations had specialist experience that the museum did not possess.

Amgueddfa Cymru's approach to volunteering prior to *Our Museum*, involved advertising specific roles suggested by individual departments, was based primarily on the needs of the museum and tended to attract a particular demographic. Volunteers were predominantly white, middle class and educated to a high level. At the start of the *Our Museum* programme there were 11 volunteers at St Fagans, volunteering in just one area of the museum.

At the end of the *Our Museum* programme a significant shift had taken place in the approach to volunteering and community engagement: four hundred and thirty-five individual volunteers have been involved in meaningful and rewarding volunteering experiences and completed over five thousand hours of volunteering at St Fagans over the period 2013 – 2015. In 2014, there were over one hundred and twenty active volunteers across all departments in St Fagans; 43% identified themselves as unemployed. Since 2012 1,890 people have been involved in volunteering, group volunteering and open days at St Fagans. At the planning stage of any project at St Fagans, the focus is on how it can be used as an opportunity to work with communities, accompanied by a consideration of the wider social impact of work practices: *'A curator explained that it has changed the way their department looks at the collections, now seeing them as "a way to inspire meaningful relationships" as well as changing the way they frame questions, "asking 'who do we work with' rather than 'who is this for?' or imposing the museum's views.'*

During Year 3, the *Our Museum* engagement team began to identify ways of sharing methodologies with other Amgueddfa Cymru sites. The team took a targeted approach, initially looking at Big Pit National Coal Museum in Blaenavon, south east Wales and the National Slate Museum in Llanberis in north Wales. They worked with staff at each museum to map local communities, identifying potential community partners to help shape volunteering and community engagement opportunities. Events were held with potential community partners at each museum to share the model developed through the *Our Museum* programme and how this could be adapted to meet the needs of the particular communities they support. At Big Pit, for

instance, the focus was on health and wellbeing and the museum as an asset for older people possibly suffering from social isolation or ill health, with the intention of building on existing work around dementia. At the National Slate Museum, the emphasis was on skills development for young people seeking employment and opportunities through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 2 Community Agency: Equal voices, written agreements, Community Engagement Strategy

Community partners worked strategically with Amgueddfa Cymru to plan and deliver the *Our Museum* programme. At the outset of the programme, time was taken to develop a structure for co-working for Amgueddfa Cymru's *Our Museum* engagement team. This was based on trying to achieve: '*an open and democratic process, where all voices were equal and people built relationships based on trust and respect.*' It was acknowledged that the programme would be a two-way learning experience, with change possible within community partners' organisations as well as at St Fagans and in the wider museum.

It was also agreed that community partners should be paid a flat rate fee for their time as it helped to 'legitimise' the time commitment individuals were making to their own organisations and gave the work greater priority. The engagement team developed a written Service Level Agreement confirming mutual expectations and responsibilities between the independent organisations and St Fagans, including day rates and time commitments. The SLA also moved the partners from a relationship between individuals in organisations to a relationship between organisations. The relationship between Amgueddfa Cymru and organisations was maintained over time, even though the individuals representing partner organisations changed as people took up new posts or moved to different roles.

In Year 1, the engagement team decided that the bulk of Foundation funding should be used for a full time fixed term post of *Our Museum* Coordinator. The engagement team, working with staff from the Museum's Human Resources department, led the recruitment and selection process, challenging and changing Amgueddfa Cymru's 'normal' practices. The engagement team had to find ways of dealing with sensitive issues. For example, in Year 2, it became clear that the Year 1 volunteer expenses policy would not be sustainable as volunteer numbers grew. Several possible courses of action were discussed. Consensus was eventually reached; the amount paid to current volunteers was slightly reduced on the understanding that this would ensure the continuation of volunteer expenses in future.

The Trustees of Amgueddfa Cymru were recognised as being themselves volunteers, whose involvement from an early stage would be key to the impact of the programme. In Year 1 the annual Board of Trustees training day explored the topic of volunteering and the *Our Museum* programme, and four Trustees volunteered to be directly involved in the programme as a result. This was the first time at

Amgueddfa Cymru that Trustees had been actively involved at the grassroots of project delivery.

The engagement team revised the Service Level Agreement (SLA) into a Partnership Agreement, focused on creating a sustainable model for sharing resources between members. This was agreed because: *'it is important to recycle and keep money and resources in the public and third sector'*. Saint Fagans allocated an element of its core budget to continue working with community partners after the end of the *Our Museum* programme. Community partners are now helping to develop a range of appropriate methods for themselves and other new community partners to work with the museum in the future.

Amgueddfa Cymru's *Our Museum* programme was focused on activity on one site and this did have limitations. Although staff on other sites were aware of the programme, they were not fully involved in its processes. In Year 3, Amgueddfa Cymru began to address this. It commissioned a Community Engagement Audit undertaken between April – August 2014, with a final report shared in November 2014. Amgueddfa Cymru then worked with Staff Champions, from across the museum and with community partners to develop a Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for the museum. The strategy sets out the direction for community engagement work for the next 10 years, reflecting *Our Museum* principles: *'it focuses on the importance of being rooted in local needs, whilst also connecting these needs to the broader national agendas in Wales. Community agency is to be placed at the heart of the museum's decision-making processes with regular participation and collaboration embedded as a way of working.'*⁴

Outcome 3 Capability Building: Addressing preconceptions, group volunteering

Amgueddfa Cymru regarded the *Our Museum* programme as a way to pilot approaches to capability building and gain learning that would feed into wider change processes across the organisation. The *Our Museum* Coordinator organised training workshops for the staff team at Saint Fagans, delivered by community partners; these directly addressed any preconceptions staff might have had about working with the people who use the community partners' services. Four half-day sessions covered Mental Health Awareness, Substance Misuse Awareness, Disability Awareness and Language, Communication and working with ESOL Learners. Staff used the training they had received from community partners to support and mentor the volunteers, further developing their own skills through practice. Volunteers attended 'taster days' designed to enable them to experience volunteering at St Fagans before making a full commitment and a new Volunteer Induction was piloted.

In the summer of Year 2, community partners helped to recruit approximately

⁴ Extract from the summary section of the Community Engagement Strategy.

seventy-nine volunteers, including fifty working with the Historic Buildings Unit to build a reconstruction of an Iron Age farmstead based on archeological work at Bryn Eryr in Anglesey. Work on the reconstruction of Bryn Eryr farmstead at Saint Fagans was delayed by planning issues with the unexpected, and positive, outcome that staff not previously engaged in the project, stepped forward to develop opportunities and undertook supervision and support of the volunteers. These staff then became ambassadors for this way of working, sharing their experiences with colleagues and visitors.

In Year 3, Amgueddfa Cymru achieved Investor in Volunteers, the national award for best practice in volunteering. Community partners suggested a new initiative - group volunteering - as a way to enable people to volunteer with people that they already knew, creating a safe space for participants until they felt ready to consider individual volunteering opportunities. The museum is working with charities that support people with additional support needs including Headway, a charity that supports people with acquired brain injury and Vision 21, a charity that supports people with learning disabilities, tailoring group-volunteering activities to their needs and aspirations.

Staff volunteering, either in differing roles within the museum or externally with community partners, was written into the Community Engagement Strategy as a form of professional development. A Corporate Volunteering programme for Amgueddfa Cymru has also been developed with the help of a community partner; this makes a clear division between Community Volunteering and Corporate Volunteering; companies that volunteer as a team building opportunity will be subject to a charge that covers Amgueddfa Cymru's costs such as staff time, materials and equipment and generates income to be reinvested into the volunteering programme. Community partners wishing to bring groups of clients as skills, capability and confidence building opportunities will not be subject to a charge.

As part of the work undertaken whilst developing the Community Engagement Strategy, staff and community partners have been researching types of training that should be provided to all staff in order to support them to work with diverse communities.

Outcome 4 Reflection: Self Evaluation Tool-kit, 'adaptive evaluation'

In Year 1, Amgueddfa Cymru's engagement team developed a self-evaluation programme, including a range of reflective practices and tools aligned to the *Our Museum* outcomes, their own strategic change objectives and specific milestones. Engagement team members posted reflective comments on outcome-focused journals set up on Teamwork, an electronic information management package used to share information and discussion electronically, and a Self Evaluation Toolkit was developed together using annotated diagrams, one for each of the four outcomes.

Over time, Teamwork was increasingly used for workaday communications rather than as a significant place for shared reflection. Instead, the agenda of every

engagement team meeting included a standing item for reflection and open sharing to enable members to always have an explicit forum to reflect and to share any difficult or 'emerging' ideas in a confidential and supportive environment. The engagement team observed that an external facilitator could help ensure that the *'reflection processes cut right across boundaries, differences, and histories to bring people together, including those museum staff who were not centrally involved in the engagement team, but had had involvement with Our Museum in other ways.'*

This ongoing process of conscious reflection has fed into updating of volunteering processes and policies, in line with what the museum calls its 'ethos of ongoing adaptive evaluation'. At the end of the *Our Museum* programme, Amgueddfa Cymru recognises that there are significant challenges to embed learning and maintain the impetus of change in a large and complex organisation. Scaling up practice across Amgueddfa Cymru and consistent and clear communication internally across the whole staff group are particular challenges. Amgueddfa Cymru considers that by its nature, the work undertaken during *Our Museum* will never be 'complete' and believes it will always need to adapt to meet the changing needs of communities.

