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South West Museum Development Programme

Satisfaction Survey Summary 2011 to 2013

In April 2013 the South West Museum Development Partnership¹ (SWMDP) conducted an annual satisfaction survey of museums in the region covering the period from August 2012 to March 2013. This built on the survey conducted in March 2012 which covered the period April 2011 to March 2012 which was conducted as part of the regions bid to Arts Council England for delivery of museum development in the region. The surveys explored museum perceptions of, and priorities for museum development. Using the same criteria the 2012 survey has enabled the SWMDP to explore the impact of the first eight months of the ACE funded programme in the region². This summary will reflect the results of the 2012 and 2013 surveys³.

Background

There are 198 museums that are accredited or formally working towards accreditation in the South West all of whom can access Museum Development services. The South West is characterised by a high proportion of independent volunteer run museums, and museums with a small paid staff base. There are several large independent museums including ss Great Britain, The Tank Museum, Wiltshire Heritage Museum and the National Maritime Museum Cornwall and local authority museums including Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Gallery and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery who are also the Major Partner Museums in the south west. Within the region there are 13 Designated collections of which several are major national heritage attractions and, alongside a wealth of other large and local heritage attractions, form a key part of the tourist offer in the South West⁴.

¹ SWMDP is the partnership awarded Renaissance Grant in Aid by ACE to deliver Museum Development in the South West of England. Bristol City Museum and Art Galleries are the grant recipient on behalf of SWMDP.

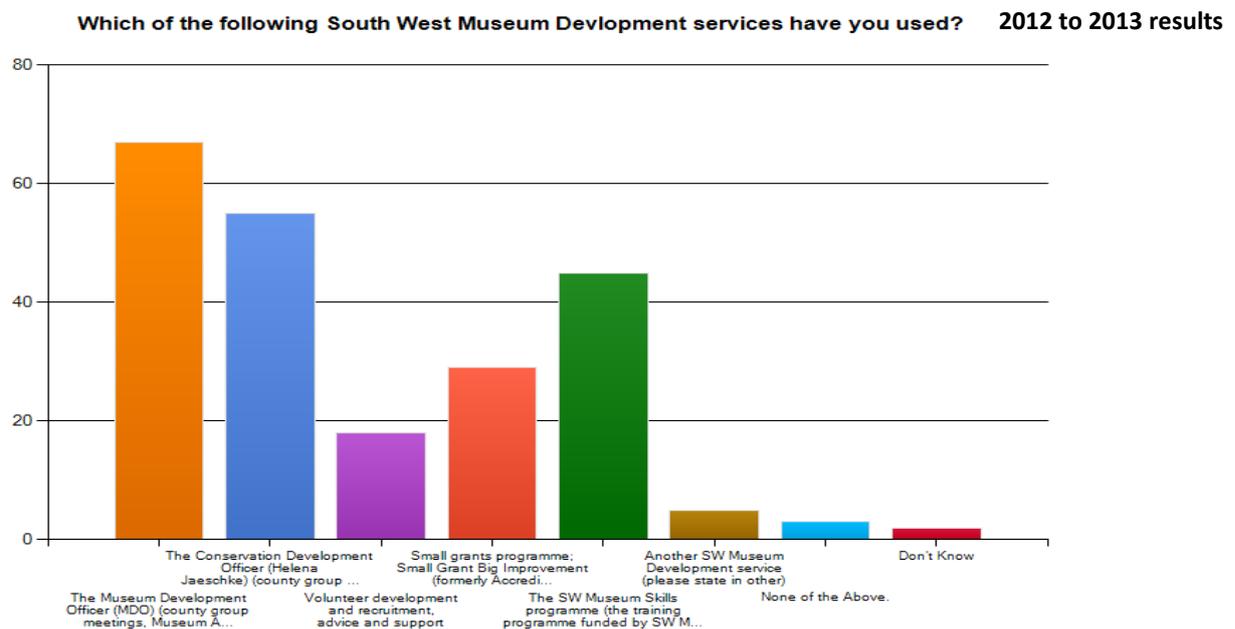
² On 1 October 2011 ACE took over Museums and Libraries following the closure of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). Year one ACE funding commenced on 1 August 2012. The first quarter, April to July 2012 was to complete work under Renaissance in the Regions and transition to the new arrangements.

³ In 2012 there were 107 completed surveys and in 2013 there were 78 completed by respondents.

⁴ http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/Collections_List_FINAL_Feb_2013.pdf

South West Museum Development – From the Museums’ perspective

Across the two surveys museums showed their primary access to Museum Development is through their Museums Development Officer (MDO) (82.9% in 2011-2012 increasing to 85.9% in 2012-2013). This reflects the comprehensive network of MDOs as shown on the SW Federation’s website⁵. MDOs provide a range of support, advice and guidance to museums which are accredited, working towards accreditation and in some counties smaller community heritage organisations who are not accredited, but seeking to formalise. This includes accreditation⁶ support alongside advice on funding, governance, project planning and delivery, developing sustainably and understanding audiences as well as training and providing expert curatorial mentoring. MDOs also provide support via their County Museums Groups and in turn some act as county reps on the SW Federation board.



The 2012-13 survey showed that the second most used service area accessed through the Museum Development Team is the Conservation Development Officer (CDO). The CDO supports museums with every aspect of caring for their collections. The CDO services range from site visits, advice on problems, funding for partnership projects, and direct training onsite to museums as well as the provision of training through the Museums Skills programme⁷. The CDO also supports museums through the provision of collection care equipment as well as enabling museums to make financial through a central purchasing programme. This is a unique post to the South West region and the results of the survey show a significant increase in museums accessing the service, up 19.5% (51% in 2012 to 70.5% in 2013).

⁵ <http://www.swfed.org.uk/museum-development/museum-development-officers>

⁶ For more information on the 2011 Accreditation standard <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/accreditation-scheme/>

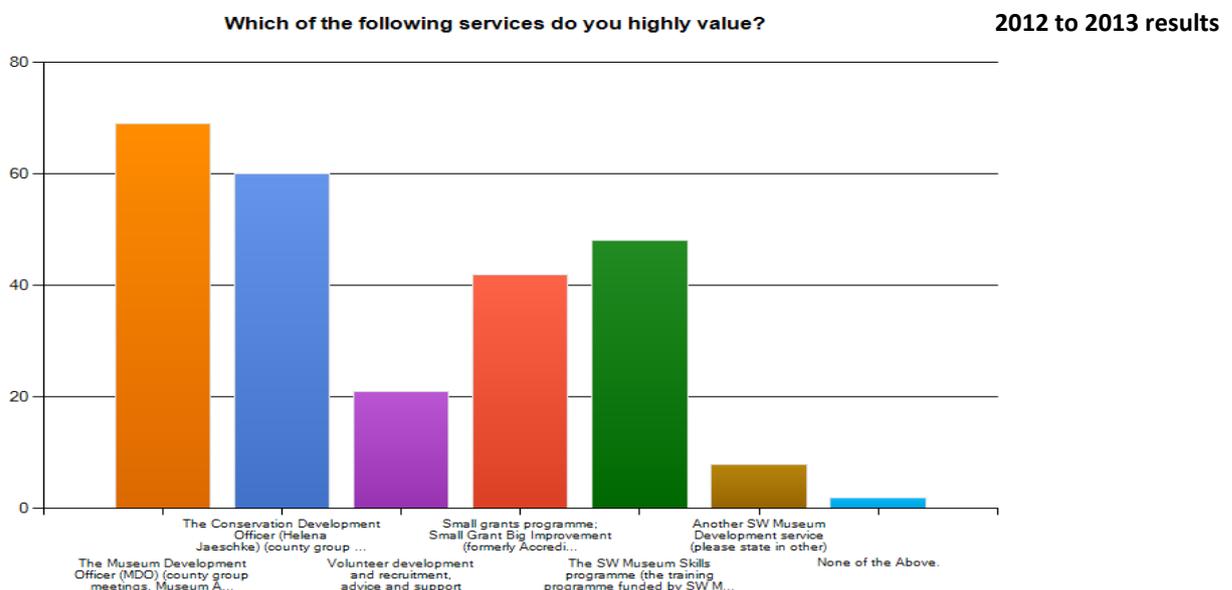
⁷ The South West Museum Skills programme which is made possible through funding from [Arts Council England](#) distributed by the [South West Museum Development Partnership \(SWMDP\)](#).

The survey also highlighted the other areas of museum development used including the South West Museums Skills Programme. This provides practical training, free for museums in the region funded by the SW Museum development programme delivered in partnership with the SW Federation of Museums and Art Galleries. The success of the programme has been due to the high quality training, generous participation of many museums across the region and the advocacy of the MDOs to their museums as a cost effective way of skilling up their workforce. Although in 2013 there was a decrease by 8% in the reported usage the Museums Skills programme for the same period the programme has exceeded its targets by delivering 16 sessions engaging 208 delegates⁸.

Alongside this is the increase in applications to the grants scheme (34% in 2012 to 37.2% in 2013). The 2012 report recorded the Renaissance small grants scheme for 2011 - 2012 was aimed at supporting accreditation projects. In 2012-13 under the SWMDP the focus was expanded and budgets increased to include a £1000 grant strand that focused on sustainability and resilience, a priority as identified by the funding body ACE⁹.

The value of Museum Development

In the 2012-13 survey museums were specifically asked to rate the value of the Museum Development services. The most valued service was the MDO at 89.6% followed by the CDO and the SW Museums Skills programme (77.9% and 62.3% respectively). This clearly indicates museums use and value the support and advice provided by MDOs and the CDO whether it is through on-site visits or through other means such as email, telephone calls and group support or through the County Museums Groups.



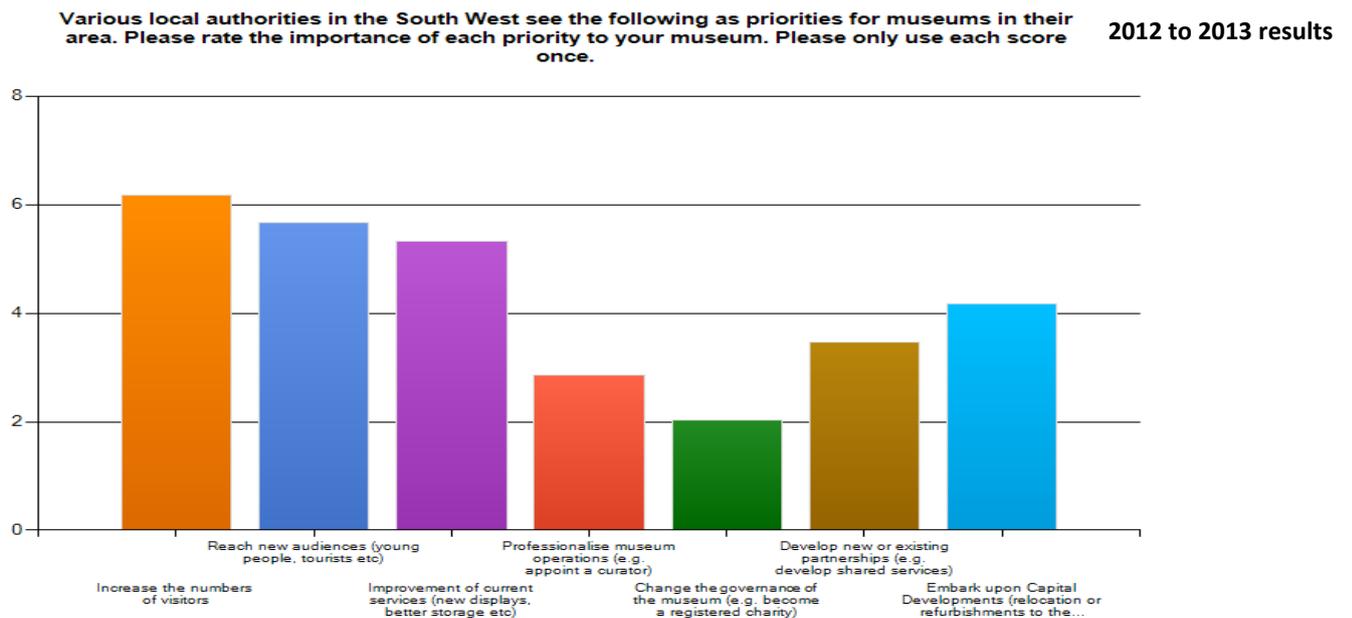
⁸ http://www.swfed.org.uk/images/content-media/museum_development/Performance_data/Museum_Skills_Report_2012-13EM_edits.pdf

⁹ See <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/> and <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/developing-great-museums-and-libraries>

To ensure that the Museum Development service continues to provide value and meets the evolving needs of the sector, the SW Museum Development team (MDOs, Conservation and Workforce Development Officers, Programme Manager and Programme Assistant) have undergone a skills and knowledge audit and will participate in the resulting skills development programme.

Responding to Local Authority Priorities

Local authorities are continuing to look at the wider impact of the cultural offer in their locality. It has been essential for the Museum Development team to understand these priorities and how to support museums to respond to them.



The seven priorities are ranked in the following order (1 being the highest priority).

1. Increase the numbers of visitors
2. Reach new audiences (young people, tourists etc)
3. Improvement of current services (new displays, better storage etc)
4. Professionalise museum operations (e.g. appoint a curator)
5. Change the governance of the museum (e.g. become a registered charity)
6. Develop new or existing partnerships (e.g. develop shared services)
7. Embark upon Capital Developments (relocation or refurbishments to the museum)

These results are important as this enables the Museum Development offer to reflect priorities on the ground and then utilise the resources available in the most effective way. It also demonstrates that museums have a clear view of their future needs for sustainability.

The SW Museum Development team have responded to the identified priority two ‘reaching new audiences’ by delivering a regional pilot project enabling participating museums to gather and analyse data on their audiences. Initially engaging 15 museums, the Visitor Focus South West project will enable participant museums to gain a deeper understanding of their visitors and develop effective and efficient means for marketing in order to reach new or increased audiences.

In response to enabling museums to develop their current services, the Museum Development Small Grant: Big Improvement grant focuses on building sustainability¹⁰. The scheme is accessible at two levels, £250 and £1000 (with 25% cash match funding). In addition to the Museum Development investment, ACE Strategic Support Grant fund has already seen awards to many museums in the region focused on building sustainability. In March 2013 the ACE awarded £1,405,657 of Strategic Grant in Aid to museums across the South West. Several of these projects were developed with the support of local MDO capacity.

Examples of projects which have received funding are available from the ACE website at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/renaissance/strategic-support-fund/>

MDOs are currently working with museums in several areas such as Gloucestershire and Dorset to develop projects for the final round of this funding which will be open in the autumn 2013.

Current Concerns and future needs of Museums

Museums are increasingly concerned about the availability of resources to support their work. In 2011 and 2012 the major concern was about the possible withdrawal of funding for MDOs (61%) followed by changes to rate relief and match funding for projects (both 38%). The medium term focus by Museum Development is to support museums to engage local authorities and ensure there is an understanding of both the contribution of the museum sector and the benefits of the museum development programme in providing effective support and value for money.

In both surveys access to funding ranked in the top three medium term needs and concerns. In 2011-12 the focus was on obtaining capital funding (17%), while in 2012-13 it was access to small grants and access to cash funds to enable matching funding for grant applications. Out of the nine priorities museums were asked to rank in the 2012-13 survey, funding requirements were ranked as follows:

2/9. Access to small grants

4/9. Access to cash funds to enable match funding for grant applications

6/9. Access to funding advice and support

Although in 2012-13 there was not a direct question about the future of MDO funding, as the current investment has been secured until 2015, the top priority was about improvement to collections and conservation, in which the SW CDO service plays a vital role to most museums in the southwest.

The other areas of future needs in 2012-13 were around “increasing services the museum offers” and “improvement to the building”. Both needs relate to the ongoing focus on sustainability which is an area which the Museum Development team are working on. The South West Museums Sustainability Programme (SWMSP) will focus on enabling museums to understand, explore and implement best practice around resilience and developing sustainability. This will lead to a strong, resilient and robust museum sector in the South West region. The SWMSP will build on tried and tested approaches to sustainability, including ‘Survive and Thrive’ which was developed with Museums in London. The project will engage museums of all types from local authorities to small community museums to review their current practices and identify how to implement improvement

¹⁰ <http://www.swfed.org.uk/museum-development/funding>

to achieve long-term sustainability and enable them to share best practice and support each other. The pilot will be launched in January 2014 with the full programme from spring 2014.

Conclusions

In the South West there is a wide usage and appreciation of the Museum Development programme across all services. The surveys indicate the importance of funding and fund raising. There has been an increase in museums accessing the small grants programme and in response an increase in the grant allocation (raised from the planned £15,000 to £26,000 in 2013). In turn the work of the Central Team focuses on raising the awareness of the programmes delivered under Museum Development including the Visitor Focus South West project, the South West Museums Sustainability Programme and SW Museum Skills training programme, delivered in partnership with the SW Federation of Museum and Galleries. At the time of writing the regional results from the annual survey will be published shortly. These results will further demonstrate how each county is benefiting from Museum Development in terms of delivery, impact and value for money.

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