

South West Museum Development Programme

Satisfaction Survey 2014 and Consultation for 2015-18

Draft 17 July 2014 revised 30 July 2014



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Introduction

In April 2014 the South West Museum Development Partnership (SWMDP) conducted an annual satisfaction survey of museums in the region for the financial year April 2013 – March 2014. This built on previous satisfaction surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013. In 2014 the satisfaction survey explored museum perceptions of, and priorities for museum development provision and also incorporated a consultation on what museums saw as their key challenges and development priorities for the future. The consultation would inform SWMDP's bid to secure Arts Council England Museum Development funding for the period 2015-18. The report also takes the opportunity to reflect on the results of the 2012 and 2013 surveys.

Key Findings

The Priorities of Museums in the South West

- Growing visitor numbers and reaching new audiences
- Greater emphasis on financial and organisational resilience
- Volunteer management, recruitment and retention cited as the main challenge to museums becoming more resilient.
- Lack of income the need to diversify income streams, cuts in funding and limited budgets also cited as major challenge to becoming more resilient.

Engagement with the SW Museum Development Programme

- Museum Development Officers and Conservation Development Officer remain the most used services. 97% engaged with their MDO and 80% with the CDO.
- Satisfaction and uptake increasing across all services provided by SWMD.
- Increasing perception of professionalisation by museums

Looking forward to 2015-18

- Conservation and collection care, volunteering and digital identified as top three areas for specialist support.
- Increasing demand from non-Accredited museums to access more MDO capacity to support them achieve Accreditation.
- When asked what makes the regional CDO service effective museums highlighted being able to access practical and cost effective advice quickly. The perception of the post as a specialist with specific knowledge of the South West museum sector was important to the museums desire to access the service.

Background

The South West Museum Development Partnership was formed in February 2012 in order to secure Arts Council England Museum Development funding to support museums in the South West.¹ Museum Development is one of four strands of ACE Renaissance funding and there are currently nine Museum Development Providers commissioned by ACE, one in each English region. The aim of the South West Museum Development Programme is to drive development and deliver sustainability, resilience and innovation in the 200+ museums within the Arts Council England Accreditation scheme in the South West so that they can maximise their benefits to audiences and communities. SWMDP is distinct from other museum development providers in that it has secured additional investment worth almost £100,000 per year from across sixteen local authorities to enhance the scope of the services available to museums

The Museum Development vision is built on Arts Council England five long term strategic goals set out in *Great Art and Culture for Everyone: A 10-Year Strategic Framework*:

1. Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries
2. More people experience and are inspired by the arts, museums and libraries
3. The arts, museums and libraries are sustainable, resilient and innovative
4. The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and highly skilled
5. Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries

The SWMDP provides museums in the South West with a range of advice and support services and development programmes including:

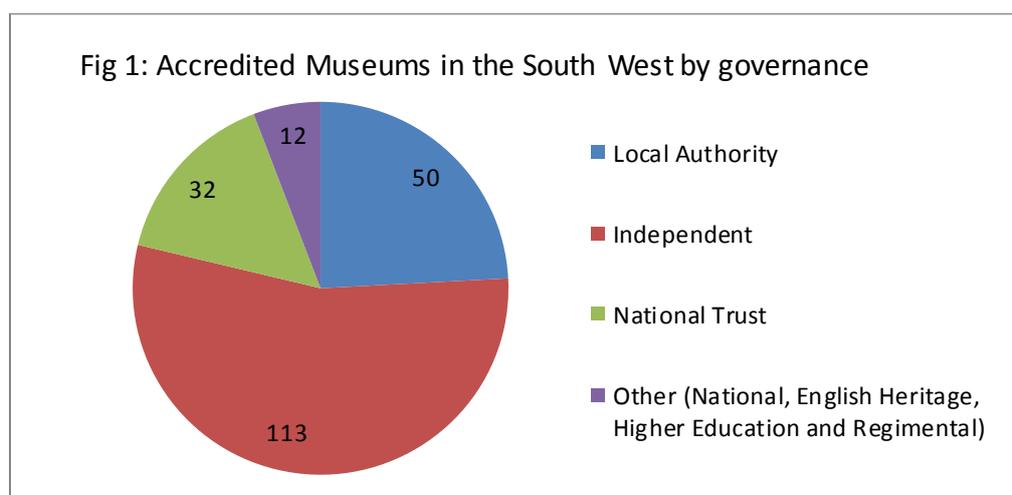
- Local Museum Development Officer provision
- Regional Conservation and collection care Development Service
- Workforce and volunteer development support
- A grant scheme Small Grant: Big Improvement
- Free training through the South West Museum Skills Programme
- Four regional development projects addressing audience development, digital engagement, income generation and organisational sustainability.

This survey and consultation is intended to inform how these services are delivered and to establish what museums priorities are for development support from 2015-18.

¹ The Partnership is formed of the three South West Major Partner Museums (ACE Renaissance Major Grant programme) Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Plymouth City Museum along with the local authorities in the South West, represented by Cornwall Council, a representative on behalf of the Independent Museum sector, the Chair and Vice-Chair of South Western Federation of Museums & Art Galleries and a representative of the Museum Development Officers in the South West. The Partnership is a voluntary and non-legal entity bringing key sector stakeholders together to deliver a comprehensive and successful regional programme of Museum Development.

Museums in the South West

The South West is characterised by a high proportion of small independent volunteer-run museums, and museums with a small paid staff base. Of the 200+ museums with the ACE Accreditation scheme, 89% receive less than 50,000 visits per annum and half receive less than 10,000 visits per annum. Within the region there are 13 designated collections, one National, a number of large independent, National Trust and local authority museums and three ACE Major Partner Museums; Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.



Survey methodology

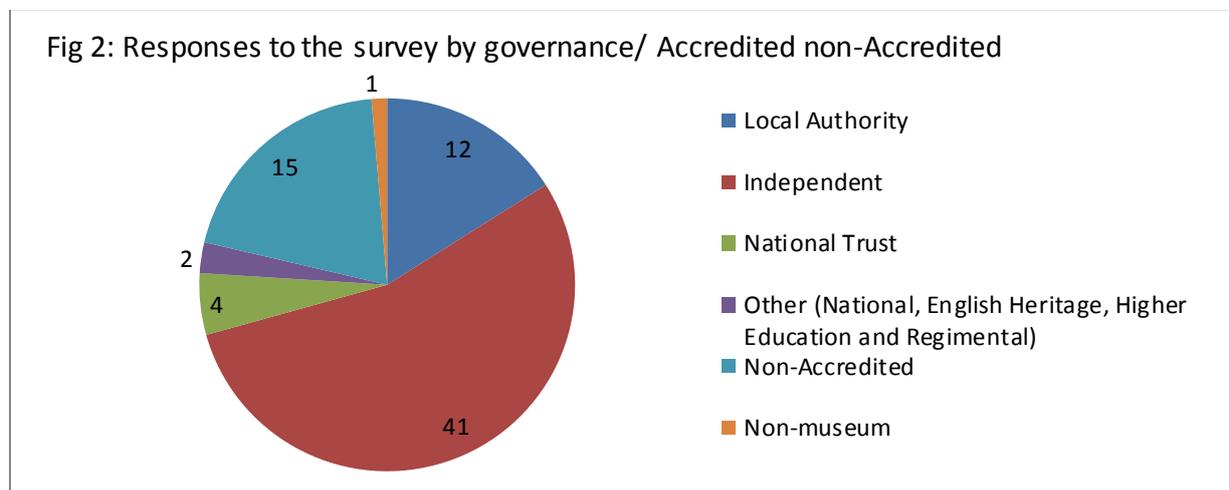
The survey was conducted by means of an online survey made available on the South Western Federation of Museums & Art Galleries (SWFed) website and promoted via the SWFed monthly e-bulletin and through the South West Museum Development Officer network. The survey was based on the previous surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013 though some questions were updated; in some instances respondents were asked to provide more information with free text responses and the way museums were asked to rank their priorities was changed so respondents could no longer rank multiple options with the same priority level. Using similar criteria as the previous surveys has enabled SWMDP to explore the impact of the ACE funded programme in the region to date.

In 2014, telephone interviews were also conducted alongside the online survey. The telephone interviews supported the online survey questions with further contextual information. Telephone interview participants were directly targeted to reflect the scale and governance of museums in the South West. The online survey and telephone surveys were conducted between 17 April 2014 and 30 May 2014.

Response to the Survey

Overall the online and telephone surveys received 75 responses. There were 68 responses to the online survey and a telephone interview was conducted with 13 participants including five who had

already responded to the online survey. The level of response was slightly down on 2012 when 107 responses respectively were received. However, the 2014 survey responses were more geographically representative and also gave a greater balance between Accredited and non-Accredited museums than in previous surveys.



Respondents to the survey were broadly representative of the museum sector in the South West with at least three respondents from each county in the South West, a mix of governance types and also a relatively large response from non-Accredited museums. One of the Local Authority responses was Somerset Heritage Service which represents three museums but for the purposes of this report has been counted as a single response. A response was also received from the South Gloucestershire Heritage Officer. The majority of responses were from Museum Directors, managers or Curators but also included representation from Trustees, volunteers and museum operational staff including education officers, volunteer coordinators, collections staff, administrators and marketing staff. There was a fairly even split between respondents that were paid staff and volunteers with 51% being paid staff, 43% being un-paid volunteers and the remaining 6% being either both paid and volunteers or in receipt of an honorarium.

Museum's Priorities

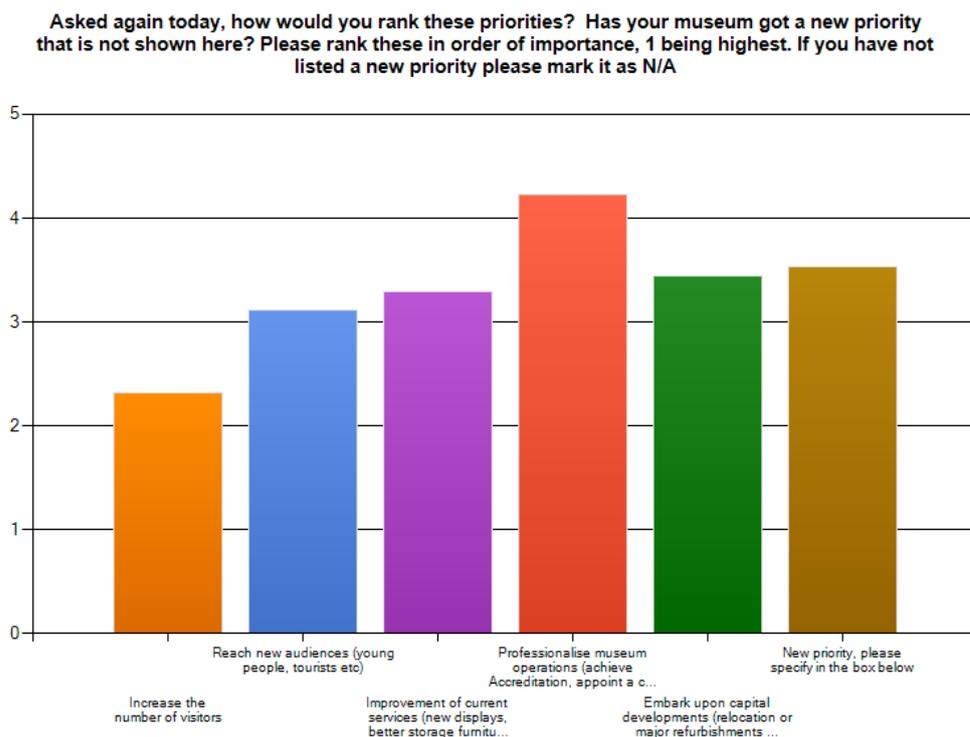
In 2012, we undertook a consultation with museums in the South West to establish the priorities of the sector. Museum's ranked the following as their five top priorities:

1. 55% - increase their visitor numbers
2. 44% - reach new audiences such as a young people, tourists etc
3. 36% - improve their current services such as new displays, better storage furniture etc
4. 29% - professionalise museum operations (achieve Accreditation, appoint a curator etc)
5. 25% - embark upon capital developments (relocation or major refurbishments etc)

The same question was asked again in 2013 and the top three priorities were the same as those identified in 2012.

In 2014, we asked the same question again with museums asked to rank the priorities in order of importance, with 1 being the highest priority. The question was also adjusted so that respondents were only able to mark one option as their top priority and had to score each option in order of importance, although they did have the option to mark an option as not applicable. In 2014 a new option was included to allow museums to include, and specify, an additional priority. There were 66 responses to this question (9 respondents skipped the question) and the results were as follows:

Fig 3: Museums priorities in 2014

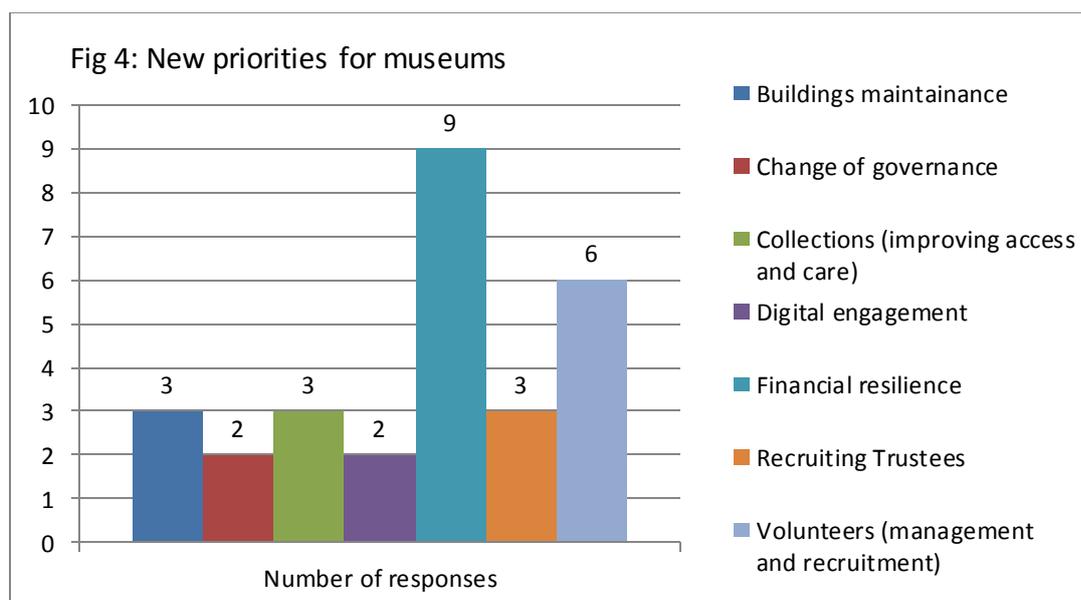


1. 44% said they wanted to increase their visitor numbers as their top priority
2. Reach new audiences such as a young people, tourists etc
3. Improve their current services such as new displays, better storage furniture etc
4. Embark on capital developments (relocation or major refurbishments)
5. A new priority
6. Professionalise museum operations

The responses show that overwhelmingly museums still see increasing visitor numbers and reaching new audiences and their top two priorities with 98% (65) ranking them either their top or second most priority. The most marked change between 2012 and 2014 has been the fall in the number of museums prioritizing the professionalisation of their operations; in 2012 28% (24) stated this was their top priority, in 2013 this fell to 5.4% (4) and in 2014 it fell again to 4.5% (3). This change could be partly explained by the adjustment in how responders were asked to answer the question but could also indicate that museums are more confident in the level of professionalism in their

operations. This latter explanation tends to be borne out by evidence in other parts of the survey and also through responses given in the telephone interviews.

There was also an increase in the number of museums stating that embarking on capital developments was their current top priority. It was the second most popular top priority after increasing visitor numbers with 21% (14) saying it was their top priority compared to 16.2% (12) in 2013, although this was still lower than in 2012 when 25% (21) said it was their most important priority. This fluctuation reflects the fact that embarking on capital development is a very time specific priority for a museum and tends to either be the most important priority or not important at all.

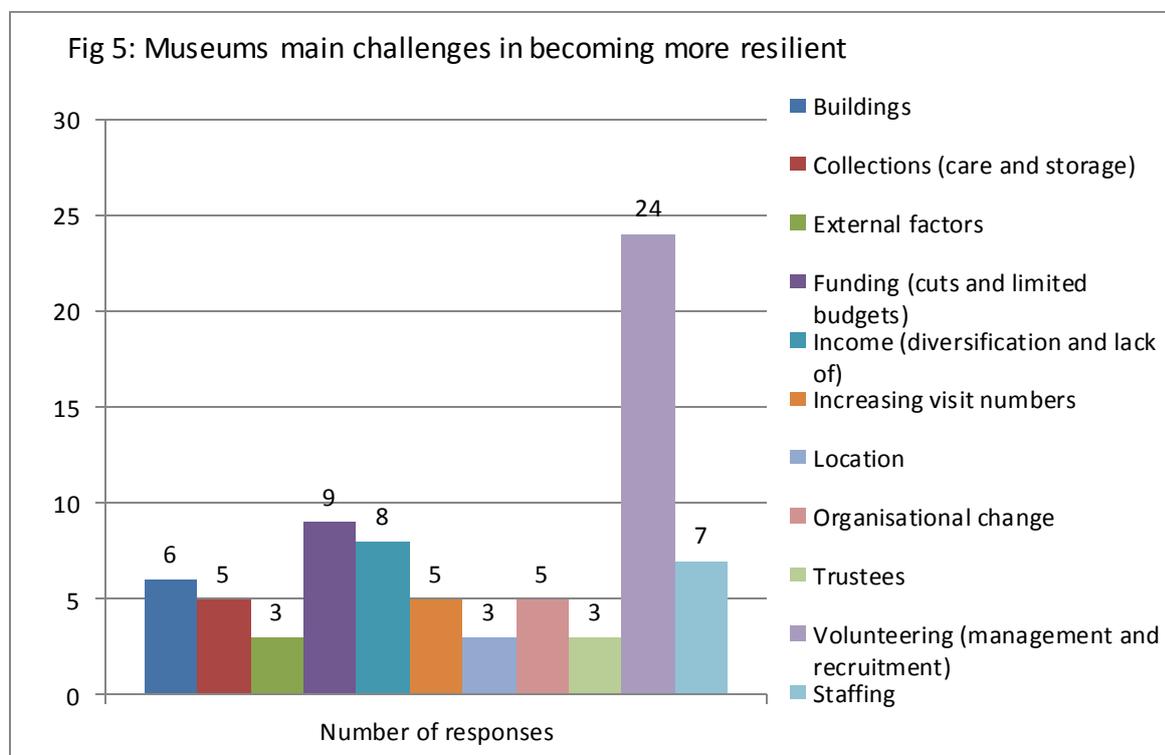


In 2014, the survey gave responders the option of including a new priority that was not previously included; these are shown in Fig 4 above. 15% (10) ranked a new priority as most important while 42% (28) said they did not have any new priorities. Overall 57% (38) of respondents identified a new priority, 42% (28) of respondents specified what this new priority was; these have been categorised into themes and are shown in Fig 4 above. Of the nine responses that highlighted financial resilience as a new priority, over half gave this as their new top priority highlighting the increasing emphasis that museums are placing on financial sustainability. Alongside financial resilience, management and recruitment of volunteers was also highlighted as an important issue. These were also the two main issues that came out regularly in the telephone interviews when interviewees were asked talk about the main challenges they face in becoming more resilient.

The challenge of resilience

Museums were asked in the 2014 survey what challenges they faced in becoming more resilient. The online survey offered a free text answer while those respondents who took part in the telephone interviews were asked to address this question in the context of the three main Accreditation areas; audiences, collections and organisational. There was a broad range of responses and many

responders identified multiple issues, these responses have been categorized into themes and are shown in Fig 5 below. There were 66 responses to this question and 9 skipped the question online.



By far the most cited issue facing museums becoming more resilient was the area of volunteering. The main areas of concern within volunteering was the management, recruitment and retention of volunteers, amongst the volunteer-run museums the lack of volunteers willing to take on key roles and an over-reliance on a few volunteers were also highlighted as issues.

Alongside a number of museums highlighting financial resilience as a top priority, financial issues were also cited as a key challenge to becoming more resilient with 17 respondents stating that a lack of income, the need to diversify income, cuts in funding, limited budgets and high operating costs were all major challenges. This highlights that even though there has been recent stabilisation in the wider economy and museums are experiences generally rising visit numbers, they are still faced with financial uncertainty and can struggle to convert visit numbers into income.

When the interview participants were asked what the main challenge to their organisational resilience was staffing was an issue that was raised by 7 of the 13 telephone interviewees. Interviewees felt that limited staffing had a major impact on their ability to improve their day-to-day operations particularly in relation to conservation and collections care, the ability to market effectively and improving visitor experience. In relation to audiences, interviewees felt that effective marketing was the main challenge and the need to refresh their offer as one museum explained:

'The biggest challenge is the 500 yards to five miles audience because they may have been to the museum and are not interested. We have to keep finding new ways of engaging them.'

Asked about challenges to collections, interviewees typically cited the lack of staffing and also limited conservation and collection care budgets while two respondents highlighted how the challenge of good collections care and management was heavily linked with the challenge of effective volunteer management and recruitment saying:

'People come for a week or month and are not regular and leave jobs undone especially on our collections management system.'

'I am concerned about collection care and documentation; it's far easier to get volunteers to do the glamorous things rather than to do the routine work.'

The following were given as explanations for the other challenges shown in Fig 5 above:

- Buildings – A lack of space, restrictions of listed buildings and lack of permanent display areas.
- Collections – Improving storage, lack of storage, implementing best practice around collections management and the need to undertake conservation work.
- External factors – Issues that are out of the museums control including parent organisations that do not have heritage as a priority, outsourcing of services and delays between a Local Authority and new building owners.
- Increasing visitors – Need to keep refreshing the visitor offer, sustaining and increasing visit numbers and a relocation necessitating the build of a new audience.
- Location – Lack of transport links and no devoted parking, need to relocate, lack of footfall.
- Organisational change – Museums undergoing period of change, lack of forward planning.
- Trustees – A lack of Managing Trustees, succession, ensuring Trustees are fit for purpose.

Museum's interaction with South West Museum Development

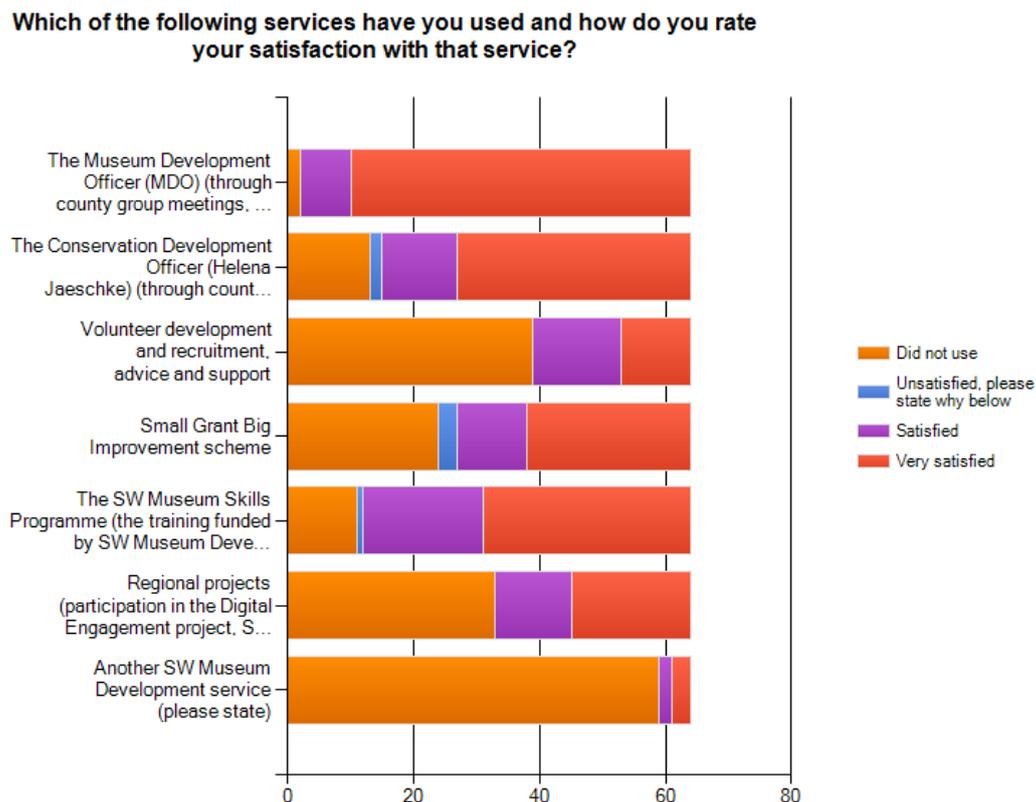
In previous years we have asked museums which Museum Development services they have used and how they value that service, for 2014 these two questions were combined. There were 64 responses to this question. Since the first survey was conducted in 2012 the level of satisfaction that museums have in the services they received has remained consistently high.

Across all three surveys 2014, 2013 and 2012 museums have stated that primary access to Museum Development is through their Museums Development Officer (97% in 2014, 86% in 2013 and 83% in 2012). In part this reflects the comprehensive local network of MDOs with 11 MDOs (7 FTE) across the South West meaning that it is straight forward and well established process for a museum to access MDO support.

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 professionalise. This includes Accreditation support, alongside advice on funding, governance, project planning and delivery, developing sustainably and understanding audiences as well as training and providing museum professional mentoring as Museum Mentors. Most MDOs also provide support via their County Museums Groups.

Local Museum Development Officer provision remains the service that museums are most satisfied with 87% (54) of respondents who had accessed the MDO service stating they were very satisfied while in 2012, 88% (70) stated they were very satisfied. In 2013 museums were asked a different question about rating how they valued a service.

Fig 6: Usage and satisfaction with museum development services



The 2014 survey showed that the second most used service area accessed through the Museum Development Team is the Conservation Development Officer (CDO). For the third year running, the number of respondents stating that they have accessed CDO support has increased; 80% in 2014, 71% in 2013 and 51% in 2012.

The CDO supports museums with every aspect of caring for their collections. The CDO services range from site visits, remote advice via email/ telephone, support for securing funding for projects and direct training onsite to museums as well as training through the Museums Skills programme. 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.

Satisfaction with the CDO service has remained fairly consistent with 73% (37) of respondents who accessed the CDO stating they were very satisfied and 76% (44) in 2012. Two respondents stated they were unsatisfied and gave their reasons as not receiving a timely response. This contrasts strongly with feedback given later in the survey where museums where asked about the

effectiveness of the CDO service, almost half of the respondents cited the speed of response as one of the most effective elements of the service.

A large percentage of respondents 60.9% (39) stated they had not accessed volunteer development advice and support; this is largely explained by the difference in scale and investment in this service. The advice and support, unlike the CDO service, is channelled through a subject interest forum, South West Heritage Volunteering Forum and is supported by small grants, study trips, training and skills sharing.

One of the most marked changes in the 2014 survey was the increase in museums accessing the Small Grant: Big Improvement scheme (previously Accreditation Support Grants). In 2014, 63% (40) of respondents said they tried to access the scheme, an increase of 26% on 2013 and 31% on 2012. This increase highlights that more museums are becoming aware of the scheme and an increasing number of museums attempting to access the grant scheme (48 applications in 2013-14 and 31 in 2012-13). This could potentially be motivated by the increase in grant limit to £1,000 in 2012-13 for projects that focused on sustainability and resilience but it also shows the success of its promotion via the South West MDO network and the SW Fed e-bulletin and website. The level of satisfaction in grant scheme Small Grant Big Improvement has increased to 65% (26) in 2014 from 56% (18) in 2012. There were three respondents who stated they were unsatisfied citing the failure to secure while one commented that they felt the process was overly bureaucratic.

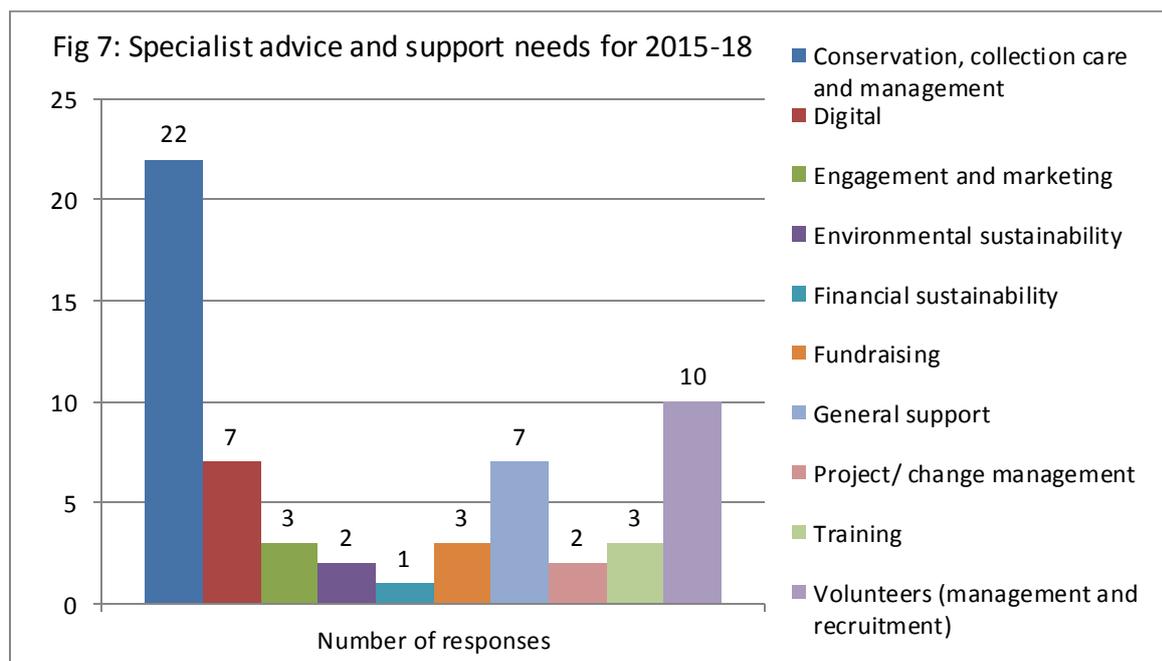
The survey also highlighted the other areas of museum development provision including the South West Museums Skills Programme which 89% (53) of respondents said they had accessed which was an increase on the 58% (45) in 2013 and 66% (69) in 2012 who said they had used the service. The increase in the number of delegate places available through the SW Museum Skills Programme could explain the increase while these results are also often dependent on whether the individual responding to the survey has personally accessed a service.

The SW Museum Skills Programme 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. In 2013-14, the SWMDP launched its regional projects that supported various development initiatives including audience development, digital engagement, income generation and organisational sustainability. The projects engaged a total of 46 museums and therefore the number of respondents stating they had accessed this service was expected to be limited, however, overall the level of satisfaction was good with 61% (19) rating themselves very satisfied and no respondents stating they were unsatisfied.

Looking forward to 2015-18

In order to inform SWDMP's bid to secure Arts Council England Museum Development funding for 2015-18, the 2014 satisfaction included a consultation with museums about what areas of support they would find most useful for the period 2015-18. Following a review of current programme delivery and building on the success of the model of regional service provision exemplified by the Conservation Development Service and CDO, Helena Jaeschke, the consultation sought a response to the proposal to introduce additional regional specialist posts or 'thematic' posts. In the online survey

the question was open ended 'What specialist advice and expertise would your museum find most useful for 2015-18'. There was a very diverse range of responses and a number of respondents highlighted more than one area of support that they would find useful. Participants in the while participants in the interview survey were specifically asked to state how useful they would find support around the areas of resilience, digital engagement and volunteering. These specific areas were selected based as areas identified as priorities for Museum Development by Arts Council England. There were 61 responses to this question with 14 skipping the question online.



As the Fig 7 above shows, the area of support that museums would find most useful for 2015-18 was in the area of conservation, collection care and management with 22 respondents citing this as the support they would find most useful. Conservation and collection care encompasses many subject area and responses varied from the very specific such as 'the conservation of newspapers' and 'the conservation of a town model' to the more general such as 'basic handling and packing procedures'. Overall the majority of the respondents that cited conservation and collection care expressed a desire for a continuation or extension to the current service model (remote advice, site visits, training, loan equipment and bulk purchasing scheme). One respondent highlighted that they would find updates on collection care procedures and best practice beneficial.

Issues around volunteering were again highlighted as a key area of need. Alongside issues cited previously such as support in volunteer management, recruitment and retention a number of respondents emphasised the importance of increasing the skills of their volunteers and also how to engage younger volunteers.

Support related to digital development was highlighted as an area where there is currently a skills gap in the advice and support available. A consistent theme was the issue of the pace of change in the digital environment and the difficulty in keeping current. Respondents highlighted various types and areas of support that they would find useful including the following:

- Information hub providing up to date information on latest technology
- Support with social media
- Provision of best practice and case studies
- Digitizing and making collections available online
- How to adapt with existing 'outdated' technology
- Helping museums work together to save money
- How to promote museums online and
- Getting audiences to engage with collections online

A number of museums highlighted that they would find access to general development support most useful or as one respondent described 'advice on all aspects of museum work'. The respondents that highlighted this were all non-Accredited museums who although can access Museum Development Officer support, this can be limited. Arts Council England is the primary funder of Museum Development the majority of support as a requirement is directed at Accredited museums or museums who are officially working towards Accreditation. As the ACE funding formula for Museum Development is primarily based on numbers of museums in the Accreditation scheme in a given area, the balance between funding requirements and 'improving access for non-Accredited museums to get into the position where they are officially working towards Accreditation' as one respondent described it, is a challenging issue. In the South West this is somewhat ameliorated through Local Authority investment in SWMDP meaning that MDOs are able to dedicate some capacity to supporting non-Accredited museums although different levels of funding from Local Authorities across the South West means that this capacity can vary.

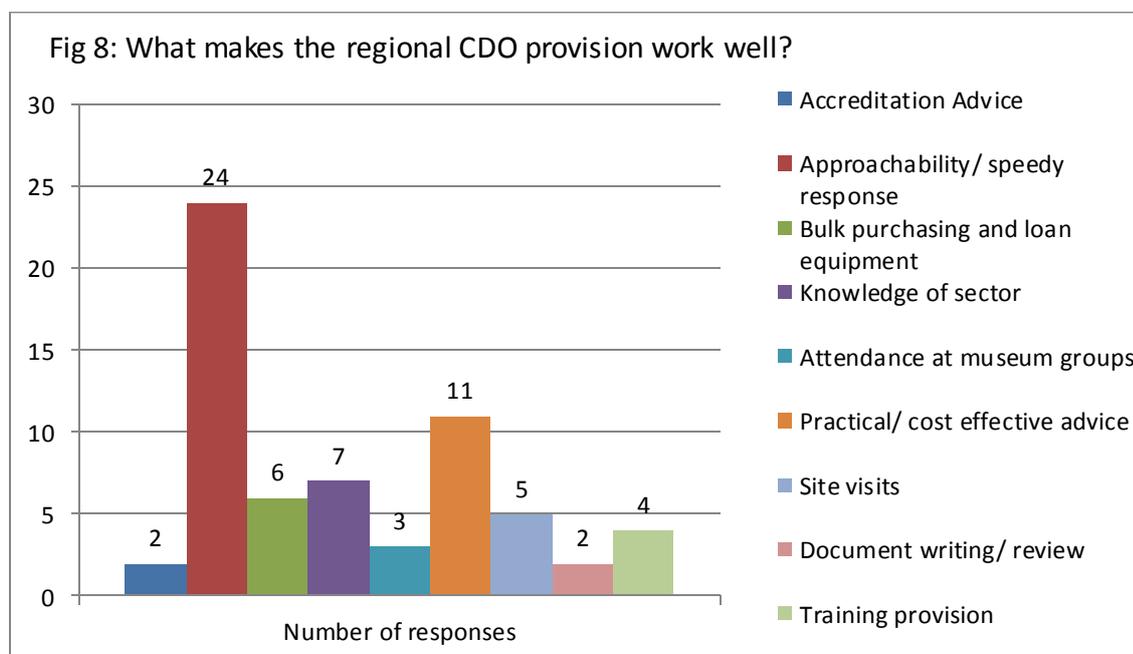
The following were given as examples of desired advice and support for the other areas of need shown in the Fig 7 above:

- Engagement and marketing –Support to develop marketing strategies, advice on innovative ways to increase engagement, how to get young people involved
- Environmental sustainability –Advice on environmental issues in relation to proposed museum extension, many facilities within our museum need upgrading...it would be really helpful if there was someone with experience in these areas who could provide both information and help coordinate with other museums facing similar issues.
- Financial sustainability – No reason given.
- Fundraising –Fundraising advice and how to apply for funding, advice on how to attract funding and fundraising advice.
- Project/ change management - Having access to advice and someone who could liaise with and advise a project team, advice on managing changes and developing facilities.
- Training – more localised small training groups, more practical collection care sessions.

How should regional services be delivered?

Based on previous satisfaction surveys in 2012 and 2013 and feedback received from museums over 2013-14, the provision of advice and support through a regional service, such as the Conservation Development Service led by CDO, Helena Jaeschke, has been identified as an effective model for the

provision of support to meet development needs in other areas of museum operations. In order to inform how these regional 'thematic' services might be delivered the 2014 survey asked museums who had received support from the CDO, what it is that works well about the service. There were 50 responses to this question with 25 skipping this question. Responses have been categorised into themes and are shown in Fig 8 below.



There was a broad range of responses to the question of what made the regional CDO service effective. By far the most common was the approachability of the CDO combined with a speedy response to enquiries whether via email/ phone and also the practical and cost effective nature of the advice and support given. Although to some degree approachability is dictated by the individual the number of respondents that identified speed of response as a key factor indicates the importance of regional services being delivered by full-time posts.

While not overtly identified by all respondents one of the successes of the service implicit within many of the responses was the in depth knowledge and experience of the museum sector in the South West that the CDO was able to draw on. The benefit of this knowledge was summarised by one respondent as follows:

'Helena knows our collection and our museum...so if I ask her a question I feel she can tailor her answer to our circumstances.'

Another benefit that is not identified in Fig 8 above but gave a clear impression of importance was the trust that museums are able to place in the advice and support of the CDO due to her independence and recognised specialism. This is summarised well by two quotes as follows:

'One of the most useful things about accessing this service is being able to use her professional expertise to help justify to line managers in my organisation why we need to do things according to particular professional standards.'

'We use the CDO service on an ad hoc basis when we have a pressing issue and we need some impartial advice or a sounding board – it's very helpful to have that from an independent person.'

Finally with regard to the ability to access this kind of specialist service one respondent highlighted that for many museums one of the most important benefits was 'getting specialised advice from a highly skilled professional which we could never afford to buy in'.

Overall these responses highlighted a number of key considerations for new 'thematic' posts the main one being that museums prioritise being able to access practical and cost effective advice quickly. Another consideration is that museums appreciated being able to access a holistic service through a variety of routes and that the perception of the post as a specialist with specific knowledge of the South West museum sector was important to the museums desire to access the service.

Conclusions

In the South West there is a wide usage and appreciation of the Museum Development programme across a wide range of museums. Museums priorities continue to focus on increasing visit numbers and reaching new audiences while there is increasing evidence that museums consider themselves to be operating more professionally. Museums are now focusing on more strategic considerations such as financial and organisational resilience although the ability to respond to these can be limited by staffing and volunteer capacity and the demands of the day-to-day.

Having proposed the idea of additional specialist regional 'thematic' posts, no museum was opposed to this although there was a very broad range of subjects that respondents felt could be covered. Overall, museums identified conservation and collection care, volunteering and digital as the three top specialisms for support for 2015-18 although there is also an increasing demand from non-Accredited museums to access more MDO capacity for general support to move towards Accreditation. When asked one what makes an effective regional service, museums said accessible, practical and cost effective advice with a quick response was most important.

Following this survey and consultation the South West Museum Development Partnership submitted its bid at the end of May 2014 to secure Arts Council England Museum Development funding for April 2015 - March 2018. The outcome will be known in September 2014. Below is a nine point summary of what has been proposed:

- A focus on resilience – supporting museums to identify what they need to develop in a sustainable and progressive way providing a package of tailored support over three years.
- A grants programme (Small Grant: Big Improvement) to support activity and developments
- More training opportunities through the South West Museum Skills Programme.
- Continuation of the regional Conservation Development Service run by CDO Helena Jaeschke supporting museums with collections care and conservation.

- 2 additional specialist regional posts supporting museums with volunteer and digital development through an advice and information service and targeted sub-regional or cluster projects.
- Enhanced data collection through our Annual Data Return so museums can save and view their historical data online. Collaboration with four other Museum Development providers in the South East, East Midlands, North East and London to extend the body of data that museums can benchmarking themselves against.
- Targeted support for museums wanting to better understand and diversify their audiences, supporting national funded programmes such as Audience Agency's Visitor Finder.
- Development of forums for sharing best practice and skills development around volunteering and digital activity.
- Continuation of local Museum Development Officer provision.

DRAFT 17 July 2014 updated 30 July 2014

For further information on the South West Museum Development programme or to discuss the information shown above please contact:

Victoria Harding, SW Museum Development Programme Manager Victoria.harding@bristol.gov.uk

<http://www.southwestmuseums.org.uk/>