

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum The Creative Café



Grant awarded: £1000
Arts Council Goal: Resilience
Year awarded: 2018-2019

Key aims of the project:

- To analyse the existing catering arrangements, identifying areas for improvement.
- Consider the relative merits and potential of in-house and contracted out café models, with specific reference to the museum's distinct selling points and challenges.
- To receive key business recommendations for the café over the first two years, within the context of local competitors and the museum's planned public programme.
- Formulate a costed action plan for substantially improving the performance of the café.
- Review the café gallery programme and identify any opportunities for enhanced income generation and the potential for more strategic community engagement.



“Having access to professional support has been really useful to both support and challenge our thinking about how to achieve a well-run, profit making and enticing catering offer”

Ruaidhri O'Mahoney, Visitor Services Manager

About the Project

The first step was to commission a consultant to undertake a review of the café's operation; scoping across the service from the staffing regime to culinary standards and menu pricing.

The museum sought several quotations and appointed one of the most experienced catering specialists operating within the heritage market. The company undertook a "secret shopper" visit, reviewed all the recent operational and financial data and met with relevant staff both on an individual and team basis. All of this was presented in a review report. Five key issues were identified which were assessed as being critical to the financial growth and success of the operation.

The final section of the report identified possible improvements, some which can be implemented in the short term and others which will require a significant level of investment to deliver.

What went well and were there any challenges?

In terms of the specialist catering review, everything that was highlighted was appropriate and useful. Enlisting the expertise of a catering specialist for a focused assessment provided a much needed spotlight on operations and provided the framework for the team to think collectively.

Many of the suggested improvements will require longer term investment planning as the review was embedded within a wider programme of business planning, developed with the support of National Lottery Heritage Fund: Resilience funding. The report is a plain talking, pragmatic document which we will adapt to an external facing version to make the case for funding.

Another positive has been raising staff awareness and involvement. The Russel-Cotes team have been catalysed to think creatively about new developments. For example a pop up café in the garden will be piloted in the near future.

How has the museum improved as a result of the project?

The museum plans to measure the impact of the project by tracking and monitoring café turnover and profit on a monthly basis. These figures will be collated and a full mid year analysis report will be produced for the Management Committee.

The team will seek visitor feedback on our café gallery exhibitions through self completion surveys and use this to help shape future programming.

They will also record café gallery sales and undertake comparative analysis with preceding years. Towards the end of the year they will produce evaluation summary which assesses the café performance.

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