

Investment in museums 2015-18

There are more than 2,000 museums in England, located in most towns and cities across the country. They are arguably the finest museums in the world, with extraordinary collections that tell stories that are more relevant today than ever before.

Museum audiences have grown consistently over the last decade, and half of all adults visited a museum or gallery last year – that's more than attendance at the football Premiership League plus the whole of the rest of league football, and more than the number of people who annually visit the West End and Broadway theatres combined.

Despite this success, many museums face difficult economic circumstances, with local authorities – the largest investor in regional museums – facing declining resources, added to reductions to our own funds and diminished National Lottery funding for museums.

Arts Council England's funding plans for 2015-18 responds to this challenge with a focus on building the resilience of museums and on close partnerships with other funders and cross-sector bodies to make best use of the resources available.

Arts Council England funds museums in a number of ways and with differing timescales. Our Major partner museums lead wide programmes of work for schools, families and lifelong learning. They develop excellent care and conservation; demonstrate innovative and engaging interpretations of their Designated collections; they focus on becoming sustainable organisations through increasing earned income; and they improve staff development through workforce training programmes.

An open application programme will provide project funding with a focus on building resilience in the sector. Priorities include encouraging new income streams and helping museums connect with their communities. A national network of museum development will continue with, and improve on, our current work, with a high quality, consistent offer across the country.

We will use strategic funds to support national projects and programmes that focus on specific areas of opportunity, including international exchange and export, digital work and partnerships with higher education establishments and National museums.

Funding to Major partner museums will increase to £22.6 million per year in 2015/16, This includes an additional £1.1 million, which has been added to the overall museums budget to encourage a greater geographical spread.

This increase in funding means we are able to announce investment in a total of 21 Major partner museums, and will allow the existing 16 Major partner museums to continue their great work.

The increased investment offers greater opportunities throughout the country, not just in terms of geographic spread, including both rural and urban museums; it also allows our Major partner museums to provide a wider leadership role.

In the Midlands two new Major partner museums have been introduced. They are a partnership between Derby and Nottingham Museums, and a coalition including Black Country Living Museum and Coventry. These will bring strong and creative programming across the Midlands – as well as innovative leadership.

The For Cornwall Museums Partnership is a fine example of consortium working, with six leading museums in Cornwall coming together for the first time as a Major partner museum and collaborating with many museums across the county. This partnership demonstrates that excellence can thrive in museums in rural areas.

Elsewhere, Museums Sheffield shows an innovative approach to display and programming as well as a robust business model and is another of our new Major partner museums. Hull Museums also joins to help build the city's capacity in anticipation of its year as City of Culture in 2017.

Despite the economic challenge, museums have achieved great things over the past few years. As the growth in audience numbers in the last decade proves, museums are an essential part of our national culture. Arts Council England is committed to working alongside museums to ensure that everyone, everywhere has the chance to access to the rich wealth of national treasures in our great public collections.

For more information about our 2015-18 investment visit:

www.artscouncil.org.uk/investment