

Museum Manifesto

The power of museums

Museums across the UK play a vital role in bringing our communities together, supporting us to understand our past and helping us to shape a fairer and greener future.

There are over 2,500 museums in the UK, with a huge variety of collections ranging from social history to fine art and from science and industry to natural history. Museums are an essential part of the fabric of society, are loved and trusted by the public and are a key part of our cultural and social infrastructure. Museums are also at the heart of civic life, helping to make our villages, towns and cities vibrant and inclusive places to live, work and visit.

Museums can help attract tourists and drive economic activity as well as providing a sense of local pride for communities. Museums can also have a transformational impact on people. They can enhance health and wellbeing and are spaces where the public can experience a wide range of cultures and ideas. Museums are actively working with communities to use their collections and knowledge to help us debate and understand the major issues that we face, such as inequality, technological change and climate crisis.

- Museums play a key role supporting national and local economies and driving tourism and the visitor economy.
- Museums help us explore contemporary issues and difficult pasts such as anti-racism and the history of the British empire.
- Museums are working in partnership with communities and using their collections to explore sustainability and climate justice and to support work towards net zero.
- Museums bring together a wide range of artists, creatives and freelancers and can support networks of creativity, research and innovation.
- Museums can use their collections to support learning and engagement and nurture the next generation to play an active role in shaping the future of society.

However, our museums face a number of serious challenges and need support and investment in order to deliver for our communities. In some cases, decades of funding cuts have put museums in a vulnerable position of managed decline, where reduction of services and closure are the only options.

The Museums Association is calling for everyone to have the right to access to museums and for new public investment in museums across the UK.

- Access: everyone should have the right to engage with and participate in museums and have access to a high-quality museum service near to where they live.
- Public investment: museums across the UK urgently need strategic public investment to look after collections and buildings and to support learning, community engagement and health and wellbeing programmes.

- Local museums: local museums deliver transformational and engaging experiences working with their communities and they need investment and support from their local authorities to do that. This means a fair, long-term funding settlement for local government to enable local authorities to support and invest in their museums. In order to reduce the likelihood of local authorities selling cultural assets to avert a section 114 notice, commissioners should be directed to protect cultural assets, including museum collections and buildings.
- Environmental responsibility: museums need dedicated funding to ensure that their buildings and collections are sustainable and so they can continue to support communities to be more sustainable and take action for climate justice.
- Infrastructure: continued support for urgent repairs and maintenance is needed; the MEND fund should be retained and geared towards supporting sustainable buildings, and the UK government should work with devolved administrations to ensure that equivalent funding is available for museums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Digital: the pandemic saw a shift in how museums operate and dedicated funding is needed so that museums can grow their digital capacity and engagement in order to remain accessible, relevant and innovative.
- Exhibition Tax Relief: the Museums and Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief has been successful in supporting museums across the UK to create innovative new exhibitions and displays. The relief should be made permanent.
- Free entry to national museums: this has been a major cultural policy success which delivers a huge range of cultural, learning and economic benefits and should be retained.
- Repatriation and understanding the legacy of empire and slavery: museums should be encouraged and supported to build equitable relationships with communities of origin and local communities to explore the history and impact of the British empire; legislation that prevents repatriation from national museums should be repealed or amended.
- Fair pay and recognition: low pay is rife in museums; museums and funders should recognise the hard work and dedication of all who work in and with museums and should implement the Museums Association's [Salary Research and Recommendations](#).