



**DCMS CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

**Understanding the Future: Museums and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life**

Nick Poole, Director, MDA

MDA is the UK's lead organisation in documentation and the management of information about museum collections.

Our corporate **Vision** is of a sector in which collections are managed effectively, efficiently and in accordance with national standards to create inspiring, engaging and sustainable services.

Our **Mission** is to be recognised throughout the UK as the focus for expertise in the management of collections.

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## Summary of response

MDA welcomes the publication of *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life* as a timely and important opportunity to consider how museums can remain fit-for-purpose and relevant to a changing society

MDA is the UK's lead organisation in documentation and the management of information about collections. Our corporate Vision is of a sector in which collections are managed effectively, efficiently and in accordance with national standards to create inspiring, engaging and sustainable services. Our Mission is to be recognised throughout the UK as the focus for expertise in the management of collections.

We believe that the extent to which museums will be able to deliver an effective service as part of the Public Realm will be defined by a number of factors. The key points of our response are listed below:

- 1 MDA is the UK's lead organisation in the management of information about collections
- 2 MDA promotes a pragmatic approach to collections management that is rooted in standards for professional practice, but defined by the principles of business development and user-focussed services
- 3 Effective management is a pre-requisite for any initiative to make collections more 'dynamic'
- 4 MDA is leading the development of standards to enable museums to manage and share their information digitally
- 5 MDA calls for a proportionate approach to the implementation of ICT that delivers user-focussed services built on established and stable technologies
- 6 MDA calls for evidence-based policy in ICT for museums, and the provision of a clear cost-benefits case for the integration of technology into core business
- 7 MDA believes that effective collections management is central to the ability of museums to deliver effective education and learning
- 8 MDA promotes knowledge management as an intrinsic and essential aspect of being a museum
- 9 Best practice in information management leads to greater efficiency in the delivery of education and learning by museums
- 10 Effective management of collections information is the basis of delivering an effective research culture for museums
- 11 MDA is driving standards which define how museums manage knowledge and information about and within their collections to support different forms of research
- 12 The role of collections management must be promoted through collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- 13 MDA believes that it is essential to continue the development of strategic links between museums and the HE/FE sector through MLA
- 14 The role of HE/FE institutions as the primary sources of pre-entry training for museum professionals should be recognised and promoted

- 15 MDA is the leading provider of training in documentation and information management for museums
- 16 MDA believes that it is essential to develop an overarching CPD framework for museum training to promote mobility and professional development
- 17 MDA calls for DCMS and MLA to work with the emergent Creative and Cultural Industries Sector Skills Council to deliver a mechanism for quality-assurance and systematic accreditation of training materials for museum professionals.
- 18 MDA supports the proposals set out in *Learning for Change*, the MLA Workforce Development Strategy
- 19 MDA believes that an overarching accredited CPD framework for the sector would be the best mechanism for increasing mobility and development for museum staff
- 20 MDA calls for further support for secondments as a valuable mechanism for career progression and mobility
- 21 MDA strongly supports the promotion of diversity in the museum workforce
- 22 MDA feels that Equal Opportunities should be embedded as a requirement across the range of funding sources supporting museum activity
- 23 The promotion of diversity requires long-term attitudinal change within museums and greater engagement with the community
- 24 MDA believes that a common understanding of the benefits offered by museums would significantly improve both engagement and advocacy
- 25 MDA calls for an extension of MLA's role to act as the single funding agency for the museums sector
- 26 MDA calls for an extension of our remit to act as a focus for the maintenance of professional standards and the provision of training, advice and support to museums in the management of their collections.
- 27 MDA believes that national standards in collections management are central to the delivery of effective museum services for users
- 28 MDA promotes the concept of a market-driven sector, within which collections are made more dynamic to promote engagement and understanding
- 29 MDA believes that there is an important role for MLA as the strategic development agency for museums in fostering partnerships both within the sector and with external stakeholders.
- 30 MDA recognises the role of *Renaissance in the Regions* in promoting partnerships within museums (through the Hubs) and with regional governance (through the Regional Agencies)
- 31 MDA is working in partnership to promote access to information and support for museums in the management of their collections
- 32 MDA believes that the *Inspiring Learning for All* framework should be developed as a model for excellence in the provision of museum services
- 33 MDA believes that any quality framework for museums must prioritise the documentation and management of collections as a core strand of delivery

- 34 MDA recognises the role of the *Museum Accreditation Scheme* in establishing a minimum benchmark for the delivery of effective museum organisations
- 35 MDA believes that standards in the management of collections and wide-scale dissemination of cultural content underpin international collaboration by museums
- 36 MDA calls for greater access to basic practical information about the structure and composition of museum governance and funding in other countries, particularly the EU
- 37 MDA believes that MLA should work with the British Council to realise the potential of international museum partnerships

This response has been collated following internal discussions at MDA, discussions with MLA staff and consultation elsewhere within the sector. The opinions and recommendations stated in this response are attributable to MDA.

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## 1. Collections and their Uses

*Question 1 – How should museums develop and utilise their collections to serve the concerns and interests of the whole of the population most effectively? Should this include releasing parts of their collections to others, including outside the museum?*

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- **MDA is the UK's lead organisation in the management of information about collections**
  - **MDA promotes a pragmatic approach to collections management that is rooted in professional standards, but defined by the principles of business development and user-focussed services**
  - **Effective management is a pre-requisite for any initiative to make collections more 'dynamic'**
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- 1.1 MDA is the UK's lead organisation in the management of information about collections. Our work is driven by a Vision of a sector in which collections are managed effectively, efficiently and in accordance with national standards to create inspiring, engaging and sustainable services.
- 1.2 To achieve this Vision, we are leading on the development of standards in the management of collections information, with a remit which encompasses professional practice, digital content, rights management and business processes for museums.
- 1.3 MDA maintains SPECTRUM, the UK documentation standard, in trust on behalf of the museum community. We believe that SPECTRUM is synonymous with best practice in documentation, and leads the way towards effective knowledge and information management for museums.
- 1.4 SPECTRUM is one of the key national standards underpinning the Museum Accreditation Scheme administered by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.
- 1.5 MDA believes that the effective management of information about collections is central to the delivery of confident and engaging museum services, better enabled to support a wide range of social, professional and public-service roles.
- 1.6 MDA strongly supports a pragmatic approach to documentation as a fundamental business process for museums. We welcome the idea of collections as a 'dynamic' resource, as defined in the Museums Association's recent *Collections for the Future* report. We feel that effective management is a pre-requisite for any initiative to make collections more dynamic, for example through rationalisation or dispersal.
- 1.7 We feel that a dynamic approach to collections and their management that is grounded in solid principles of business development and user-focussed services is one of the most important factors in delivering a strong museums sector for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 1.8 MDA will be working with the Museums Association to take forward the recommendations of *Collections for the Future*.
- 1.9 To explore the wider potential of collections information, we are developing a national advocacy campaign *Collections for All* (<http://www.collectionsforall.org.uk>) in partnership with MLA, the

National Museum Directors' Conference, Museums Association, Regional Agencies and numerous smaller museum organisations.

- 1.10 *Collections for All* will examine the social, professional, economic and 'knowledge' impact of the management of museum information. As one of the outcomes of the campaign, MDA is developing *Documentation for Diversity*, a range of products for museums which demonstrate how documented information can support the delivery of inclusive services for communities and users.
- 1.11 One of the key aims of *Documentation for Diversity* is to provide a means of unearthing the 'hidden histories' of cultures and communities, currently inaccessible within collections management databases. Early findings also indicate that this work will provide a way for museums to record the responses of diverse users to their collections, and to incorporate them as an active part of the information about an object.
- 1.12 In terms of releasing parts of collections to others, including outside the museum, MDA feels that partnership beyond the traditional museum community is key to unlocking this potential. This idea is picked up in greater detail later in this response, but we feel that if museums are able to work in partnership with a wide range of non-museum organisations, this will promote wider participation and engagement.
- 1.13 MDA feels that it is through best practice in collections management that museums will achieve the corporate confidence to engage in these wider partnerships effectively.

*Question 2 – How can the sector ensure that the opportunities offered by ICT, electronic access and digitisation are fully utilised for the benefit of users and to reach out to non-users?*

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- **MDA is leading the development of standards to enable museums to manage and share their information digitally**
  - **MDA calls for a proportionate approach to the implementation of ICT that delivers user-focussed services built on established and stable technologies**
  - **MDA calls for evidence-based policy in ICT for museums, and the provision of a clear cost-benefits case for the integration of technology into core business**
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- 1.14 MDA believes that documentation and information standards are fundamental to enabling museums to capitalise on the potential of ICT. The cultural sector has a unique and central role to play in the future development of the e-Society both as a source of authoritative content and through our professional skills in managing and presenting information for diverse audiences.
- 1.15 MDA is leading the development of standards in collections information management and interoperability for museums. Our aim is to drive forward the creation of seamless access to collections information across the whole of the sector in partnership with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).
- 1.16 While initiatives such as the NOF-digitisation programme and Culture Online have enabled museums to engage in large-scale content-creation, we believe that museums are still in their infancy in terms of understanding the long-term benefits and implications of digitisation.
- 1.17 We feel that if museums are to become more sophisticated in their use of ICT, it will be necessary to establish meaningful and valid indicators both for quality of provision and cultural participation online.
- 1.18 We further feel that the cost/benefit case for museums to engage with ICT has not yet been fully and compellingly articulated. There remains a significant proportion of museums who have not embraced ICT as a means of engaging with audiences, and the online representation of the sector in particular is fragmented and of variable quality. There is clear evidence that museums who have applied ICT successfully have done so by regarding it as a tool through which to deliver a core service.
- 1.19 A key area in the development of greater confidence and use of ICT among museums will be the provision of channels for training and skills development. In particular, we believe that it is essential to provide museums with relevant ICT skills which will enable them to become 'intelligent' customers when procuring both systems and services.
- 1.20 At a strategic level, MDA calls for continuous research to provide statistical evidence of the current level of ICT implementation across museums. While basic surveys were conducted by MLA in 2001 and 2004, we feel strongly that there is a need for rigorous and longitudinal evidence-gathering which will highlight trends and enable a more targeted approach to establishing a stable infrastructure.
- 1.21 Finally, MDA believes that it is essential for the application of ICT by museums to be user-driven rather than technology-driven. In recent years, we have seen a significant number of pilot projects to evaluate new or emergent technologies. We believe that it is time to take the lessons learned through this process and apply them to the creation of stable and sustainable services that are based on established technologies and standards.

## 2. Learning and Research

*Question three: How can museums strengthen their commitment to education as a core and strategic priority within the overall commitment to collections and users?*

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- **MDA believes that effective collections management is central to the ability of museums to deliver effective education and learning**
  - **MDA promotes knowledge management as an intrinsic and essential aspect of being a museum**
  - **Best practice in information management leads to greater efficiency in the delivery of education and learning by museums**
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- 2.1 MDA believes that effective collections management is central to the ability of museums to deliver effective education and learning. We are working to promote collaboration and skills-sharing between curatorial and education staff in museums to ensure that the potential of collections information is realised and promoted across the range of professional disciplines.
- 2.2 Through the SPECTRUM documentation standard and our advice and support services, we are working to ensure that curatorial staff take education into consideration from the moment an object enters a museum and throughout its life as a part of the collection.
- 2.3 MDA recognises the potential of the *Inspiring Learning for All (ILFA)* framework as a model for excellence in museums as learning organisations. We feel that collections management should be closely integrated within this model.
- 2.4 MDA promotes knowledge management as an intrinsic and essential aspect of being a museum. The effective management of knowledge enables museums to be learning organisations, able to benefit from the skills and expertise of their staff.
- 2.5 We feel that there is a strong business case for driving best practice in collections management as part of delivering education and learning. Well-managed information leads to efficiency savings for museums, reduces duplication of effort across departments and frees up both staff and resources which can be targeted towards delivery.
- 2.6 Further, the management of digital information based on core standards enables museums to become aggregators and publishers of educational content to the wider community of formal and informal learners.
- 2.7 By ensuring that information is managed to a common standard, we are promoting the development of interoperable services, which can enable the museums sector as a whole to engage effectively with the delivery of Curriculum-based education.

*Question four: How can a strong research culture be built and sustained, as well as quality measured across the museums sector? What role should Government play?*

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- **Effective management of collections information is the basis of delivering an effective research culture for museums**
  - **MDA is driving standards which define how museums manage knowledge and information within their collections to support different forms of research**
  - **The role of collections management must be promoted through collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)**
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2.8 MDA supports the principle that research and scholarship are intrinsic functions of museums. We also believe that it is important to be pragmatic about what can be achieved. As noted in the consultation document, research activity will always to an extent be institutionally determined and resource-dependent. However, we feel strongly that research activity in museums is driven by processes of knowledge and information management which can help to overcome localised obstacles.

2.9 At MDA, we are driving standards which define how museums manage knowledge and information within their collections. These standards, and in particular the SPECTRUM documentation standard, provide a national (indeed, international) framework for how information about objects is created or captured, managed and subsequently used.

2.10 We believe that research in museums comprises two elements:

- Research by museum professionals based on their collections and the collections held by related institutions for exhibitions, publications etc.
- Research by non-museum professionals (whether in the academic or research sectors) which is not necessarily museum-focussed, but which uses museum collections as source or reference material.

2.11 Research is based on realising the knowledge and information that is inherent within museum objects. We feel that the effective management of information about collections is fundamental to this activity.

2.12 To support the development of a strong research culture, we would advocate the widespread adoption of standards in the management of knowledge for museums. In managing the information about their collections, museums are participating in the long-term aggregation of research activity which in turn can be disclosed and re-purposed to support ongoing research in the future.

2.13 The Arts & Humanities Research Council plays a primary role in defining the research culture for museums. MDA is working with the AHRC to ensure that standards in information management, and particularly the SPECTRUM standard, are meaningfully embedded into funding requirements.

*Question five: How could stronger links be created between the Higher and Further Education sectors and museums?*

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- **MDA believes that it is essential to continue the development of strategic links between museums and the HE/FE sector through MLA**
  - **The role of HE/FE institutions as the primary sources of pre-entry training for museum professionals should be recognised and promoted**
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2.14 At a strategic level, we believe that the museums, HE & FE sectors already enjoy strong links. MLA has been effective in establishing partnerships with the JISC and AHRC, particularly in defining priorities for ICT and development within University museums.

2.15 Both the HE & FE sectors remain the primary routes to employment within the museum sector. As such, it is essential that museums work constructively with HE/FE institutions to ensure that the training and development they provide reflect the skills and aptitudes required for museum professionals.

2.16 As organisations which maintain museums and museum collections, it will also remain important that on ongoing dialogue exists between HE/FE institutions and the wider museum sector. Since collections within HE/FE institutions represent a significant part of the nation's cultural heritage, it is essential to ensure that they are included in the development and adoption of standards for best practice.

### 3. Careers, Training and Leadership

*Question 6. How can the sector achieve the right balance of pre and post-entry training to build skills for the range of their workforce?*

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- **MDA is the leading provider of training in documentation and information management for museums**
  - **MDA believes that it is essential to develop an overarching CPD framework for museum training to promote mobility and professional development**
  - **MDA calls for DCMS and MLA to work with the emergent Creative and Cultural Industries Sector Skills Council to deliver a mechanism for quality-assurance and systematic accreditation of training materials for museum professionals.**
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3.1 MDA is the leading provider of training in documentation, information management and associated legal issues for museums. We are strongly committed to supporting ongoing professional development for the sector through our national network of accredited training providers.

3.2 Our training services have two key aims:

- a) To support documentation professionals in achieving best practice
- b) To support non-specialists in gaining a greater understanding of the processes and potential of documentation

3.3 MDA is working to address pre-entry training in collaboration with HE/FE providers to ensure that best practice in documentation is represented in museum studies and heritage management course.

3.4 We believe that a sound grasp of the potential of information management for museums helps to define attitudes and behaviours for museum professionals. It is essential to ensure that this understanding is embedded into the processes by which people enter the profession.

3.5 MDA is working to address post-entry training in documentation across the range of professional disciplines. This work is defined by a model of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

3.6 MDA believes that the establishment of an overarching CPD framework for the museum profession is essential to delivering both professional development and greater workforce mobility for the sector.

3.7 The Museum Association's AMA has demonstrated the value of a CPD framework for museums. MDA would like to see this extended to create an accredited framework for development based on accredited training materials published by the relevant authoritative organisations in each discipline.

3.8 MDA further calls for DCMS and MLA to work with the emergent Creative and Cultural Industries Sector Skills Council to deliver a mechanism for quality-assurance and systematic accreditation of training materials for museum professionals.

Question 7 – What initiatives and targets would increase mobility, training and career progression for all types of museum professionals.

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- **MDA supports the proposals set out in *Learning for Change*, the MLA Workforce Development Strategy**
  - **MDA believes that an overarching accredited CPD framework for the sector would be the best mechanism for increasing mobility and development for museum staff**
  - **MDA calls for further support for secondments as a valuable mechanism for career progression and mobility**
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- 3.9 MDA is committed to promoting best practice in collections management through training and ongoing development. We strongly support the proposals set out in *Learning for Change*, the MLA Workforce Development Strategy.
- 3.10 MDA believes that the provision of an overarching CPD framework for museums would be the best mechanism for increasing workforce mobility and promoting professional development.
- 3.11 In particular, the mapping of such a framework to existing recognised developmental systems such as the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) would promote mobility into and out of the sector as well as within it.
- 3.12 MDA feels that information and knowledge management are core workforce skills, which are transferable across a range of disciplines both within and beyond museums.
- 3.13 Our experience as a provider of training services to museums has demonstrated that the sector as a whole would benefit from the development of a sustainable business model for training provision.
- 3.14 On the client side of this model, we feel that it is important for training ‘mediators’ (for example, Regional Agencies, Hubs or Local Authorities) to promote the idea of museums as ‘intelligent customers’ for training services, equipped with the information and expertise necessary to make informed decisions about the form and content of training.
- 3.15 On the supply side of the model, it is clear that current levels of funding within museum budgets mean that cost-margins for training provision militate against the delivery of training and development on a commercial basis.
- 3.16 MDA strongly supports the use of secondments as a mechanism for mobility and career progression within the sector. Evidence in support of the Sharing Museum Skills Millennium Awards Scheme indicates that secondments promote the acquisition of new skills, increased confidence and opportunities for career development.
- 3.17 MDA calls for the emergent Sector Skills Council to promote secondments and skills exchange between culture-sector institutions.

Question 8 – What must be done to secure a better representation of currently under-represented groups in the museum workforce, and in the sector’s governance.

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- **MDA strongly supports the promotion of diversity in the museum workforce**
  - **MDA feels that Equal Opportunities should be embedded as a requirement across the range of funding sources supporting museum activity**
  - **The promotion of diversity requires long-term attitudinal change within museums and greater engagement with the community**
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- 3.18 It is the duty of museums to reflect the society whose cultural heritage they are preserving. This can't be done effectively if the workforce itself is not reflective of that society. MDA therefore strongly supports the principle of promoting diversity in the museum profession.
- 3.19 If we are to secure a better representation of currently under-represented groups in the museum workforce, we need to understand why this representation does not currently exist. MDA believes that it is not sufficient to ask what can be done to address diversity, we need also to ask why this diversity is not present.
- 3.20 Only by gaining a better understanding of the obstacles to entry to the sector can we establish long-term strategies to counteract them. In the absence of this understanding, we will only be able to put in place short-term solutions which do not address the heart of the problem.
- 3.21 In this context, we also believe that it is important to embrace a wider definition of diversity which includes gender, sexuality, religious or political belief and age as well as ethnic or cultural diversity.
- 3.22 We feel that there are two mutually interdependent sides to addressing the situation:
- Identifying whether there are institutionalised or in-built prejudices or obstacles in the learned behaviours of the sector when recruiting or developing staff
  - Opening effective channels of communication with the wider community to establish what the obstacles are, and how they might be addressed
- 3.23 Significant progress has been made in this area already, notably through the Museums Association's *Diversify* programme of positive action traineeships. We believe that the question of addressing in-built obstacles centres around attitudinal change within museums. If these changes are to become embedded, we feel that they should be driven through statutory requirements inherited through funding organisations and wider governance.
- 3.24 We feel that Equal Opportunities should be embedded as a formal requirement across the range of standards and funding streams/structures for museums, for example, within the Museum Accreditation Scheme, or the requirements of the AHRC application process.
- 3.25 Finally, we feel that at least one of the contributing factors to the current situation is generational. Museums have worked hard to address the principle of diversity of the workforce in recent years. It will naturally take some time for the effects of this work to become apparent, particularly given the relatively low staff turnover within the sector as a whole. It is essential that mechanisms for tracking the diversification of the workforce should be longitudinal.

#### 4. Coherence and Advocacy

Question 9 – *Would structural changes better support museums and provide effective means of ensuring a national strategy for museums?*

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- **MDA believes that a common understanding of the benefits offered by museums would significantly improve both engagement and advocacy**
  - **MDA calls for an extension of MLA's role to act as the single funding agency for the museums sector**
  - **MDA calls for an extension of our remit to act as a focus for the maintenance of professional standards and the provision of training, advice and support to museums in the management of their collections.**
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4.1 MDA welcomes the inclusion of Coherence and Advocacy as a core strand of this consultation. We feel that it is time to address the structure and organisation of the sector to ensure that we are fit-for-purpose and able to address our role as a vital part of the Public Realm.

4.2 The sector can be taken as being organised around a strategic development layer, a mediation/support layer and an operational/delivery layer. Within this model, there are a wide range of different types of organisation. The operational layer in particular is defined by a diverse group of museums operating either autonomously or under various forms of governance.

4.3 While we celebrate the diversity of the sector, we do also feel that it tends to militate against the delivery of a national 'offer' for museums. In the absence of a common understanding of the services provided by a 'museum', there tends to be an expectation on users to engage with and understand a relatively complex structure for delivery.

4.4 MDA's work is underpinned by a strong commitment to the principles of marketing. These principles hold that services should be defined according to demand, and should be articulated clearly to stakeholders, customers and users in terms of the benefits which they offer.

4.5 As well as promoting clarity for users, MDA believes that greater consistency and a common understanding of the services provided by museums would significantly strengthen the sector's ability to advocate its position both within Government and with potential partners in other sectors.

4.6 MDA believes that the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council has emerged as an important and authoritative strategic development agency for museums. Following the successful rollout of *Renaissance in the Regions*, we feel that there is a compelling argument to extend MLA's role within the sector to act as a single funding agency for all museums.

4.7 We believe that the establishment of MLA as a single funding agency for museums would enable the delivery of greater clarity and consistency in both the organisation and advocacy of the sector.

4.8 At the same time, a single funding agency would be able to overcome institutional barriers between different types of museum to promote national standards across the range of professional disciplines.

- 4.9 If a single funding agency were to be established for the museums sector, it would be important to clarify the scope of its remit, and particularly the nature of its relationship with representative organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 4.10 MDA believes that the structure of the mediation/support layer for museums is complex and that this complexity tends to militate against the provision of simple, timely access to information and support for museums in managing their collections.
- 4.11 Under the current model, the infrastructure for support in the sector includes:
- National professional/standards organisations such as MDA
  - The development of Hub museums as centres of excellence
  - The role of Regional Agencies in the provision of advice
  - Local/regional networks of Museum Development Officers
  - Subject Specialist Networks developed through *Renaissance in the Regions*
  - Curatorial and other local advisers
  - Informal local partnerships and skill-sharing networks
- 4.12 MDA is developing its role to address the full range of collections management practices for museums. We feel strongly that there is a compelling argument for an extension of our role to act as a national centre of excellence in the management of museum collections. Under the strategic leadership of MLA, such a centre of excellence would provide a focus for the maintenance of professional standards and the provision of training, advice and support to museums in the management of their collections.
- 4.13 Working in collaboration with the range of professional organisations, a national focus for collections management would significantly enhance access to information and best practice for museum professionals.
- 4.14 In addition, a national organisation with a responsibility for collections management practice would be better positioned to identify gaps in current provision and commission material to address them.

*Question 10 – How best do we combine more coherent and efficient delivery of museum services with a service that is responsive to the needs of local communities and users?*

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- **MDA believes that national standards in collections management are central to the delivery of effective museum services for users**
  - **MDA promotes the concept of a market-driven sector, within which collections are made more dynamic to promote engagement and understanding**
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- 4.15 As set out in the previous response, MDA believes that one of the most significant challenges confronting museums is the ability to market the benefits and value of the sector as a unified entity to diverse stakeholders including the general public, Government, commercial and academic sectors.
- 4.16 MDA believes that an enhanced role for MLA as a strategic development agency would enable them to coordinate effective advocacy of the role played by museums as part of the Public Realm.
- 4.17 MDA is working to embed standards for best practice as a mechanism for delivering more coherent and efficient museum services. These services must be defined by the demand from within the community, both ‘traditional’ users of museums and non-users.
- 4.18 We further feel that aligning individual museums as a local delivery mechanism for a national ‘offer’ for museums would create a clear framework and shared vocabulary within which to market their services effectively.
- 4.19 Under the model of a market-driven offer for museums across the whole of the sector, it is particularly important to address ways in which collections can be made more dynamic, flexible and accessible.

## 5. Partnership and Measuring Value

Question 11 – How can partnerships within the museums sector and with other sectors be better embedded?

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- **MDA believes that there is an important role for MLA as the strategic development agency for museums in fostering partnerships both within the sector and with external stakeholders.**
  - **MDA recognises the role of *Renaissance in the Regions* in promoting partnerships within museums (through the Hubs) and with regional governance (through the Regional Agencies)**
  - **MDA is working in partnership to promote access to information and support for museums in the management of their collections**
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- 4.20 MDA believes that there is an important role for MLA as the strategic development agency for museums in fostering partnerships both within the sector and with external stakeholders.
- 4.21 We feel that partnerships can be tremendously beneficial as a means of sharing information and expertise. At the same time, to succeed, they must be adequately resourced and focussed around the delivery of commonly understood outcomes.
- 4.22 Partnerships between individual museums or groups of organisations have long been a defining feature of the museum sector.
- 4.23 MDA is working in partnership with a range of organisations within the sector to deliver effective support for museums in the management of their collections. We feel that by coordinating the description of the range of services which we offer, we are able to deliver greater clarity and improved access for museum professionals.
- 4.24 MDA recognises the role of *Renaissance in the Regions* in promoting partnerships within museums (through the Hubs) and with regional governance (through the Regional Agencies). The development of Subject Specialist Networks through *Renaissance* addresses an important role for partnerships between museum professionals within a shared thematic/subject area.
- 4.25 MDA feels strongly that partnerships with other sectors and external stakeholders should be understood as mutually beneficial. The work of Arts & Business and related organisations has demonstrated that museums benefit significantly from the exchange of expertise and insight from other sectors. At the same time, museums have a great deal to offer to a diverse range of sectors, both commercial and non-commercial.

Question 12 – What systems of methods should be used to assess quality and success in the museums sector?

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- **MDA believes that the *Inspiring Learning for All* framework should be developed as a model for excellence in the provision of museum services**
  - **MDA believes that any quality framework for museums must prioritise the documentation and management of collections as a core strand of delivery**
  - **MDA recognises the role of the *Museum Accreditation Scheme* in establishing a minimum benchmark for the delivery of effective museum organisations**
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4.26 MDA believes that there are two key strands to assessing quality and impact within the museums sector:

- The operational and economic efficiency of individual museums as businesses (even where they are subsidiaries of wider governing bodies such as Local Authorities or Universities).
- The value of the cultural and qualitative experiences which museums provide to users.

4.27 As indicated in the consultation document, the sector is well-provided with mechanisms for assessing the former. The benchmarking activity of GLLAM and *Renaissance in the Regions* is significant, but it is important also to remember the role of the Museum Accreditation Scheme as a minimum standard for museums. The Museum Accreditation Scheme and its predecessor Registration Scheme have provided a continuous statement of expectation of museums in terms of museum management, user services, visitor facilities and collections care.

4.28 MDA believes that the focus for the development of indicators of the sector's worth should be on the latter question of the wider impact of its work. In this context, MDA sees a significant role for the development of the *Inspiring Learning for All* framework. ILFA has provided a framework for excellence in the delivery of cultural services. In defining a comprehensible and comprehensive picture of what it means to be an excellent cultural institution, it is aspirational while also providing a mechanism for tracking improvement.

4.29 One of the key features of the ILFA framework is that it is essentially outward-facing and user-focussed. A quality framework driven by a wider application of ILFA would, by implication, promote fundamental principles of marketing, wider accountability and openness for the sector.

4.30 It is for this reason that MDA is working to embed the principles represented in *Collections for All*, our national advocacy campaign, within the ILFA framework. We feel that collections and the ability to deliver against wider social agendas are part of the same continuum, and must not be regarded as opposing interests.

4.31 On a final note, we believe that it is important to divorce the notion of quality of provision from that of the significance of collections. We feel that a definition which regards a collection as significant per se, rather than as a part of a business process that is defined by delivery of services, should not form part of the assessment of the wider impact of the sector.

*Question 13 – What would need to happen to make international strategic alliances possible between museums?*

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- **MDA believes that standards in the management of collections and wide-scale dissemination of cultural content underpin international collaboration by museums**
  - **MDA calls for greater access to basic practical information about the structure and composition of museum governance and funding in other countries, particularly the EU**
  - **MDA believes that MLA should work with the British Council to realise the potential of international museum partnerships**
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- 4.32 The standards and services maintained by MDA, in particular the SPECTRUM standard, are recognised internationally as defining best practice in the management of museum information. We believe that the community of museums is global and the interests and concerns of UK museums are shared with all museums, wherever they are located.
- 4.33 MDA believes that there is tremendous value in international partnership and collaboration, both through skills transfer and increased mobility of collections. However, there remain significant practical and logistical obstacles in the way of museums wishing to work internationally.
- 4.34 We feel that museums need greater access to basic intelligence about the provision of cultural services overseas. Structures of governance, funding and delivery have an important impact on the extent to which organisations are able to work together meaningfully and it is important for museums to access to simple information about who best to contact to initiate collaboration.
- 4.35 MDA believes that one of the key roles for MLA as the strategic lead on international working for museums is to develop a 'branded' identity for UK museums overseas. We feel that an aggregated and clearly articulated identity for museums would overcome the difficulties experienced by individual museums in seeking international partnerships.
- 4.36 As part of this development, MDA believes that it is essential to begin to address the cost/benefits case for museums in engaging with international work. In the absence of a clear business case, it is difficult for museums to allocate time and resources to developing international partnerships.
- 4.37 At a strategic level, MDA believes that it is critical to establish partnerships in support of lobbying and strategic development. Many of the large-scale policy developments (for example the Public Sector Information Directive) affect museums and cultural institutions across nations. We feel that lobbying to secure the optimal outcome for museums in response to these developments is far more effective when coordinated between governing organisations in different nations.
- 4.38 In terms of supporting the development of strategic alliances between museums, MDA feels that there is significant potential for greater collaboration and engagement with the work of the British Council. Many of the issues and questions confronting museums are generic to any organisation seeking to work internationally, and we believe that the museums sector would benefit significantly from the expertise and support of the Council.