

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM HERITAGE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

Guidance Notes

WRITING A LEARNING STRATEGY & POLICY DOCUMENT

WHY DO YOU NEED A LEARNING POLICY?

Developing a learning policy document will encourage your organisation to think about its provision for learning, to assess what it currently does and to think about what is realistic and achievable to aim for when planning a high quality experience for your visitors. It will provide a framework for describing what you offer to schools and other groups, and will help you meet the Quality Indicators which refer to planning and communicating your learning programmes.

A learning policy document can also be useful in when applying for external funding, as it will provide the context for any specific project you may plan, showing how it fits into your longer term aims. It should also help your organisation focus its marketing activities and budget.

The process of writing the policy is as important as the document you end up with, as it will provide a framework for discussing, planning and resourcing your learning work in the future. Ideally, the policy should be drafted in discussion with all those who are involved in your learning work – staff and volunteers. It is best, though, to have one designated person to manage the process and to put together drafts for discussion and agreement. Later, the process of policy review will be equally important and should include all those involved.

What should a learning policy document contain?

A learning policy does not need to be a lengthy document, but should include the following information:

Mission statement - outlining your organisation's overall purpose, making it clear what it stands for in terms of education and learning.

The learning resource - a summary description (a couple of paragraphs or so) of the historic site (buildings and grounds), any collections or objects and displays, documents, photographs and other archive materials.

Facilities - available on site for learning groups.

Aims - a statement of your organisation's general intentions for learning.

Objectives - statements about how you intend to meet each aim.

Staffing resources available and training needs.

An action plan - with timescales over an agreed period, identifying the person responsible for each task, and measure(s) of success.

STEP BY STEP TO DEVELOPING YOUR LEARNING POLICY

1. Assess your learning resource

A simple audit approach is best here. Visit all areas or galleries, following the usual visitor route if there is one. Include the building itself, if appropriate, including the exterior and grounds. Make a brief note of the contents of each area, including objects, explanatory labels and displays, interactive or handling tables, audio-visual facilities (film or sound recordings), room information cards etc. Assess the maximum number of students each area could reasonably hold (this might vary for different ages or for different activities) and note any physical access issues and likely bottlenecks.

Then consider the curriculum relevance of each area – a professional input from a teacher, local authority adviser or museum learning officer (see section 8) is useful here. For example, your collections or property may be relevant to students studying the National Curriculum in different subject areas, post-16 students studying art, history or English or they may be useful for older students following vocational courses in tourism or conservation. There may be simple, low-cost improvements you can make to displays to support better learning experiences for school groups - if so, note these too. (See example gallery audit sheet at the end of this document.) You should remember that the subject matter of the curriculum is regularly reviewed, and you should consult the website of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency for up to date information (see Resources section).

In addition to the specific subject-related curriculum relevance of each gallery or area, there will be broader potential learning benefits for groups visiting your museum or property. These might include the development of social skills such as collaboration, negotiation and sharing, and learning/thinking skills such as investigation, reasoning, creative thinking and evaluation. An out of classroom visit provides great opportunities for the development of these skills in a new and exciting place and working with different people, but these need to be made explicit in teachers' visit planning and the learning objectives set. While you are carrying out your audit, think about the ways in which a range of different activities on site can help develop these skills. Again, professional input will be very useful here.

2. Assess your facilities

Also consider facilities available to groups. Many small organisations will not have dedicated rooms for learning activities, but there may be other areas that could be used creatively. Make sure you mention any of the following your organisation can make available:

- lavatories (including those with access for disabled people)
- any space where a class might gather at the start or end of a visit to be briefed by their teacher
- meeting rooms that might be used for a teachers' training session
- picnic areas or covered open space where school groups might eat lunch or shelter if wet
- a lockable store room where students' belongings might be left during a visit
- car/coach parking, or reference to public car parking close by.

3. Assess your staff /volunteer strengths and availability

For smaller organisations, the limitations of staff/volunteer time and expertise may be seen as the biggest constraint on what can be offered to school groups. Surveying and recording the expertise available is likely to uncover strengths you can work on when developing your **aims and objectives**.

If your organisation depends on volunteers, you can use this process to discover more about their personal preferences and training needs. Some volunteers prefer to work on 'project-based' activity with an end in view. These might be asked to work on a project such as the creation of loan boxes for use in schools, or handling collections within the displays. Others prefer an ongoing commitment, with regular face-to-face contact with schools (teachers or students) or running weekend activities for

families. If you do not have a specialist learning officer, consider recruiting volunteers with specific and recent experience in teaching.

4. Decide your budget

You will need to identify the costs of the activities you decide to offer, so it is best to earmark a budget, even if this is very small at first. You will also need to decide which services or resources you will offer as included in the visitor experience, and those which will incur an additional charge. Do some research into charges made by other organisations, and decide how you will receive payment to make the administration easy for you and schools.

5. Identify your priority audiences

Your audit of the resources available to you should lead you to consider and define your target audiences. These might be:

- pre-school early years children, with parents and carers
- school (primary and /or secondary) and college students
- students in higher education
- teachers and tutors
- adult education groups
- family groups
- local community groups
- children and adults with special needs
- specialists and researchers.

You can't aim for all of these at once, so be realistic. The Learning Outside the Classroom initiative is specifically concerned with the provision made for young people 0- 19 years old, so you may want to make these your first priority and address the others over time.

6. Decide your aims and objectives

An aim is a general statement of what you hope to achieve in terms of the learning work your organisation does. You may already have some idea of these but it is worth discussing and amending any existing aims in the light of the information you have gathered in steps 1-5. An objective is a specific action statement about how you will achieve each aim; some aims will need several objectives.

Example

Aim 1: To provide a learning service at the museum for those in formal education (i.e. schools, colleges and similar institutions)

Objectives

1.1. establish a dialogue with teachers, tutors and local education authority advisory staff to find out what is needed for groups or individuals to have a positive learning experience in the museum.

1.2. make learning accessible through interpretation, provision of additional learning resources, provision of training for teachers and tutors, or workshops for learners.

1.3. provide optimum physical conditions and a safe environment for learning to take place.

1.4. set up and maintain an administrative structure to ensure an efficient service for those in formal education.

After you have drafted your aims and objectives, break down each objective into simple steps, with a timescale, a note of who will be responsible for carrying out that stage and an indication of how you will

measure whether you have been successful. Include here too any reference to costs and possible income. This will be your strategic action plan, and you may decide to develop a short term plan – say for the next two years – or a longer term five-year action plan; this plan will be your working document, and will be useful to refer to on a regular basis.

A useful explanation and examples of aims, objectives and action plans may be found in the AIM Focus Paper *Learning in Smaller Museums* (see Resources section).

7. Review and evaluation

Your action plan should have included reference to measures of success for the various tasks or activities. These might include data on numbers of participants or educational groups, broken down into age ranges if possible, feedback from teachers on the quality of the visit or experience (this may be done via a simple feedback form, or by telephone interview if the teacher is willing), and feedback from students on what they have learned and enjoyed (or the reverse). See the guidance on Evaluation for further suggestions.

This information should be used to review and develop your learning policy. A learning policy should be formally reviewed every five years, but should be revisited more often – say every two years – to help your organisation ensure it is continuing to meet the needs of its audiences.

8. Getting help

If your organisation does not have a learning officer, or a volunteer with recent experience of mainstream education, you might like to invite one or two teachers from your nearest school to help you with assessing the learning opportunities and curriculum relevance of your property or collections. Teachers are busy but are usually willing to help given enough notice. You may be able to develop this link and use a small group of teachers as a sounding board for new ideas and developments

Sometimes a local authority adviser will help in running courses for teachers, advising on curriculum opportunities, or will suggest a suitable teacher to work with (see Resources section).

If you have a 'hub' museum or an historic property with a professional learning team in your locality you may be able to get some support from them to help you draft your learning policy, as part of their commitment to wider development. Regional museum hubs are a cluster of 4-5 museums which receive government investment in order to develop as centres of excellence and act as leaders of their regional museum communities (see Resources section). They might also be willing to act as mentors or offer job-shadowing opportunities to volunteers or non-specialist staff.

Other organisations may be interested in working together with yours. For example, an archive or local records office might be interested in running joint training for teachers, or a small museum might offer workshops for students in partnership with a nearby historic house.

RESOURCES

1. *Cracking open culture - Museums, schools and creativity - Creating partnerships with LEA Advisers and schools*. A useful downloadable booklet, written by Ian Coulson, history and geography adviser, Kent County Council and Adrian Norton, humanities consultant, Four S (Surrey School Support Services) with the South East Museum, Library & Archive Council.

http://www.segfl.org.uk/projects/show/MLA_South_East_-_Creating_museum_partnerships_with_LEA_advisers_and_schools/

2. The Association for Independent Museums (AIM) produces useful papers on various topics including the Focus Paper *Learning in Smaller Museums*. <http://www.aim-museums.co.uk/pages/pg-5-aim-focus-papers/>

3. The partnership for Renaissance South East has a useful section on its website to offer support and guidance to museum staff and volunteers wanting to develop their services to schools. It includes sections on the curriculum and new developments in education as well as practical guidance. Useful to historic houses and other providers as well as museums.

http://www.museumse.org.uk/ABC_working_with_schools/index.html

4. The Renaissance programme for museums and the role of museum hubs is explained in the Museums, Libraries and Archives website <http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/renaissance%20faq/>

5. *Inspiring Learning for All* is a framework for developing and improving learning provision and environments. It contains very comprehensive guidance and useful examples and downloads. <http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk>

6. The website of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency contains details of the current curriculum for all ages. Go to <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk> and then click on Key Stages 1 & 2 or Key Stages 3 & 4. Information is listed by subject. Make sure you look at other subjects as well as history; there are opportunities in many areas of the curriculum including art and design, geography, citizenship, and religious education. The website also contains details of any planned curriculum review.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about LOtC, the Quality Badge and learning through heritage, visit the following websites:

www.lotc.org.uk

www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk

www.gem.org.uk

Produced by the Heritage Sector Partnership with funding from the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom.

EXAMPLE GALLERY AUDIT SHEET (EXTRACTS)

Galleries and themes	Displays, resources and space	Curriculum relevance	Opportunities to support learning and the development of skills
<p>First World War and Second World War Themes: Home Guard, Civil Defence and some World War I</p>	<p>Contents Telephones, arms, posters, eg aircraft identification, food shortages and rationing, pictures Part mock-up of camouflage and sandbags scene with three costume models of Home Guard, St John's Ambulance lady and also a surgeon captain from WWI Text, and audio phone with information - home front, rationing, sound effects of air raid warning, music and oral history extracts.</p> <p>It may not be easy for children to differentiate between WWI and WWII objects.</p> <p>Resources Handling objects including 6-8 gas masks, helmet, rattle, typewriter. Interactive field telephones. Reference book.</p> <p>Space for 6-8 students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History KS2 Britain since 1930 – impact of Second World War on life in Britain History KS 3 – changes in warfare in the twentieth century History KS4 – GCSE impact of Second World War on life in Britain 	<p>Develop handling collection area by adding pictures and photographs of how the objects were used. Develop loan boxes on same topics with activity cards for use in the classroom.</p> <p>Oral history extracts could be made available on CD for schools? Could more use be made of these in the displays?</p> <p>Putting WWI and WWII together confusing for children? Any chance of making the distinction more obvious in the display?</p>

Galleries and themes	Displays, resources and space	Curriculum relevance	Opportunities to support learning and the development of skills
<p>Local industry Gallery</p>	<p>Contents Objects relating to coopering, shoe-making, printing, brickworks, farming, barge building, and a telephone exchange</p> <p>Text, with some good pictures, a model of boat-building yard. Very few objects behind glass, and good view of items. Objects are robust.</p> <p>Good display of different decorative bricks and patterns.</p> <p>Telephone exchange can be operated.</p> <p>Space for 15 students working in small groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History KS1 – How people worked then and now • History KS2 Local History Study • History KS3 local aspects of industrial development • Geography KS2 Knowledge and understanding of the local area and how it has developed 	<p>Provide key questions for teachers to use to ensure pupils are focused on particular objects and the processes they represent, possibly including an ecological slant.</p> <p>For example, picture of a beer can, simple facts and figures about raw materials and where they originate, manufacture and disposal of beer cans, with question ‘How is coopering different?’ Or supply pictures of modern farm machinery with their functions, with question ‘Which tools did the same job?’</p> <p>Develop a handling area within the display with simple question cards about each object, to encourage close observation and analysis</p> <p>Prepare an archive pack or loans box. This would need relating to period – eg on industry in Victorian times or 1930s onwards</p> <p>Interview local residents with experience of working in these different industries in the past, for playing recordings in the gallery or to put on CD/DVD teaching resources. Gathering this oral evidence and producing the CD could be a useful coursework project for older students to carry out on behalf of the museum.</p>