

# A MANIFESTO FOR MUSEUMS IN THE SOUTH WEST

This document has been produced by the South Western Federation of Museums & Art Galleries. Formed in 1931, we are a membership organisation and charitable trust representing the interests of museums and museum workers across the South West, giving us a unique and permanent role as the independent voice of museums and of the people who work in museums in the region.

The Manifesto comes out of direct, face-to-face consultation through 14 meetings with 180 museums and from individual survey responses submitted by those who work in museums. This manifesto therefore represents the 'chalk face' vision of how we wish to develop our sector in the South West over the coming years.

This consultation has shown that museums do not believe that MLA is providing an effective service to the Museums sector in the South West, in comparison with the level of engagement, advocacy and support delivered by agencies serving other sectors. Although there is some delivery of training and Accreditation is supported, both of which are welcomed, there is little engagement with museums, no meaningful information-seeking activity to enable MLA South West to deliver informed advocacy, and no feedback to engender confidence in its activities.

It is widely felt that the direct grass-roots support and informed advocacy previously offered through the South West Museums Council has been lost, and trickle-down support through Renaissance in the Regions is patchy. As a result, museums are becoming increasingly disenfranchised, disillusioned and disempowered.

A radical re-structuring of the delivery of investment and support is required. This Manifesto sets out the points of action needed to enable the South West's museums to achieve their full potential as a "single, joined up, museum sector that will, over the long-term, deliver real benefit to individuals, communities and the economy"<sup>1</sup>.

## The Vision

Our vision for Museums in the South West for the next five years is for:

- A strong museums network and infrastructure
- A regional museums service providing an equitable level of professional curatorial and developmental support
- Effective advocacy for Museums

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<sup>1</sup> Vision statement from *Developing a National Strategy for Museums in England*, Hedley Swain, Head of Museum Policy, MLA Council, October 2007.

## **We expect of ourselves that we will:**

- Operate for the benefit of our communities
- Work together and share our knowledge and expertise with fellow museums
- Keep ourselves informed
- Provide information about our services to others
- Care for our collections to appropriate standards
- Encourage learning from and enjoyment of our collections
- Be effective, efficient and relevant
- Plan for the future

## **To deliver this, Museums need:**

- Recognition of their community value
- Predictable long-term funding and investment sources
- Access to qualified curatorial and operational support – e.g. an ‘MDO’
- Straightforward access to small grants
- Locally delivered, demand-led training
- Simple access to nationally and regionally-held collections
- Support and recognition for the contribution of volunteers
- Coherent communication and effective advocacy

## **Within the wider context, Museums need:**

- Recognition of their contribution to sub-regional, regional and national strategies
- Regional organisations to champion museums
- Influence within Government

## **Conclusion**

We, the South Western Federation of Museums and Galleries, will ensure that we work towards the aims of this Manifesto by continuing to talk and listen to our members, the region’s museums and our sector’s representative bodies.

This Manifesto is a summary of a longer document, available on-line at [www.swfed.org.uk/manifesto/](http://www.swfed.org.uk/manifesto/) or on request from the Federation Co-ordinator  
Email: [co-ordinator@swfed.org.uk](mailto:co-ordinator@swfed.org.uk).

# **www.swfed.org.uk**

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