



Press Release

Engaging Archives with Inspiring Learning for All

1 November 2005

MLA North West are pleased to announce the publication of a new report on 'Engaging Archives with *Inspiring Learning for All* (ILfA). The report is now available on our website at <http://www.mlanorthwest.org.uk/news/index.asp?id=459,55,2,55> from where you can access both the full report and an executive summary.

The report summarises the findings of research undertaken during the spring and early summer of 2005 by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester on behalf of MLA North West. The study arose from a perception that the archives domain had been generally slow to engage with *Inspiring Learning for All* coupled with a belief that the potential for archives to contribute to learning was in danger of going untapped.

MLA North West therefore commissioned the research to find out what challenges and barriers exist to archives engagement with ILfA and therefore how best MLA North West can support the development of ILfA in archives.

The study looked at a number of archives in the North West through in-depth interviews with representative practitioners across the full spectrum of the domain - from larger services to single-staffed repositories, from archives of different types and across a range of attitudes towards public access and learning. The research also drew on the findings from a colloquium attended by leading practitioners in the field from outside the Region. The aim was to identify and analyse the challenges and barriers which have - so far - militated against positive engagement with ILfA in the Region and beyond.

The study found:

- Low levels of awareness of the existence and content of ILfA within the domain
- Limited practical engagement with ILfA
- Practical constraints arising from a narrow understanding of learning in its broadest sense as defined in the ILfA framework
- A lack of understanding of the nature - and strength - of learning in archives
- A real potential for archives to develop the many different kinds of learning that they already enable

In addition, it is suggested that the lack of engagement with *Inspiring Learning* is symptomatic of a more general level of isolation from the modern public policy agenda - something that the archive domain needs to address.

The report also suggests a number of solutions to the problems that have been identified, particularly by emphasising what archives can do to support learning. It:

- Identifies what archives can do to support learning
- Recognises the need to showcase best practice and demonstrate - through evidence (now being assembled in the North West through the Learning Advocates programme) - the nature and strength of learning in archives
- Suggests ways round many of the perceived barriers to engagement
- Challenges archives to take positive steps to make accessible learning central to their role

Beyond this, the report also sets out the key steps for drawing archives into closer engagement with the contemporary agenda. This is based on suggestions for organisational and attitudinal change to equip archives to focus more clearly on

aspects of public policy where they can make substantial contributions and win recognition and support.

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