

So what has Renaissance ever done for us? –

RENAISSANCE IS TRANSFORMING REGIONAL MUSEUMS, DEVELOPING WORLD CLASS, SUSTAINABLE SERVICES FOR ALL



Emma Anderson
North West Hub Project Manager

This is an exciting time for the North West Hub museums and galleries. They represent a wealth of outstanding collections of fine and decorative art, industrial history, natural history, palaeontology, Egyptology, fashion and textiles. Together we are working to improve what we do for visitors, for school children and for people who wouldn't usually visit museums and galleries. One year on, there are big projects underway in all venues, increasing access to collections and making connections with hard to reach groups; and more people, more children and more teachers are getting involved in what we do.

The idea of museum Hubs across the nine regions of England was developed a few years ago as part of a programme called Renaissance in the Regions.

It has attracted substantial government money and there is even more to come. The investment has paid off: all across the country Renaissance is changing the way museums work, putting the visitor at the centre of everything we do.

We have been working very closely with MLA North West and together we are delivering the Renaissance programme for the region. We started this by producing Celebrating Our Cultural Heritage – a five-year strategy for museums and galleries in the North West.

We are now collaborating to plan for the next two years. We feel it is important to communicate a single vision for Renaissance in the Regions. Therefore, we will be doing regular Hub updates in In Focus and developing the NW Hub section on the MLA North West website.

EMMA ANDERSON
North West Hub Project Manager



Photography by Jan Chlebiak

Visitor at the Whitworth Art Gallery



WHO WE ARE

There is a small core team working for the NW Hub; we are based at Manchester Art Gallery, part of Manchester City Galleries.

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HUB PARTNERS

THE NORTH WEST MUSEUMS' HUB IS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN:

Manchester City Galleries (lead partner)
Bolton Museum & Art Gallery
Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston
Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle
The Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester

THE FIRST PARTNER VENUES ARE:

The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester
People's History Museum, Manchester
Lancashire County Museums Service

What is the Hub doing?

The Hub has been given £2.46m by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council to deliver a series of innovative projects from 2003-6. We have created 32 new posts across Hub venues and together we are focussing on increasing access to collections, education and learning, strengthening the working of our museums, developing the workforce and understanding our audiences:

Working with schools

In 2003 we commissioned research to help us understand better what teachers and school children wanted from museums and galleries. We found out that many teachers value museums as "the keeper of so much magic for kids". As a result of these findings, we are working on ways of helping teachers and children get more from the experience of interacting with our collections.

"The children's fascination with the artefacts was a joy to share."
Teacher from schools outreach project, Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery

Working with communities

We are developing a wide variety of projects to get as many people as possible involved with our museums and galleries. New outreach projects are using developing links with local community groups, using creative and reminiscence work.

"I didn't realise what community meant until I did the Local Treasures project."
Male access and inclusion participant, aged 15, Bolton Museum & Art Gallery

Using ICT

We have been working to improve access to knowledge and information about our collections. We now have dedicated ICT staff, digitising collections, creating new narratives about objects and training staff.

"When you start work as a curator you step inside a centuries old tradition. When you work in a virtual museum, you have no precedent. That's what's exciting and difficult about it."
Online Gallery Curator, Manchester City Galleries

Improving services

Front of House staff have been recruited to increase operational efficiency in Hub venues, and are already demonstrating excellent results.

"The Front of House Manager has been absolutely invaluable."
Harris Museum & Art Gallery.

Understanding our audiences

We have commissioned visitor profile research that is telling us who our visitors are and also who is not visiting. This means that for the first time the Hub has a clear picture of visitor trends and this is helping us plan to put the user at the heart of everything we do.

"Statistics are a tool rather than a chore now."
Steve Garland, Head of Museums, Bolton Museum & Art Gallery

Learning from what we do

Our Research and Evaluation Officer is helping the Hub museums develop as learning organisations, equipped to take on new challenges and agendas. We are examining current evaluation practices and evaluating Hub-funded initiatives to develop and improve the work we do.

"The evaluation process has really helped us question some basic assumptions." Manchester City Galleries

Inspiring the Workforce

This is a Hub-wide workforce development initiative to help us build the skills we need to place learning firmly at the centre of each organisation. Staff are using Inspiring Learning for All to develop a culture of learning in all the museums.

"The Learning Styles workshops are helping us think about our own preferred ways of learning and those of our visitors."
Joanne Irvine, Improving Visitor Learning Co-ordinator

What are we achieving?

All the Hubs have been set targets by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The NW Hub is working to achieve 38,000 new contacts between children and our museums and galleries, and 57,000 visits by new visitors by the end of March 2006.

Progress towards delivering our targets can already be seen around the region. In the last year, over 26,000 school children have visited Manchester Museum, and Manchester City Galleries have increased the number of children taking part in weekend and holiday workshops by 873%.

Renaissance funding is also having an impact on the development of new audiences for the Hub. Tullie House has increased by 34% the number of people involved in community outreach, and is developing this through the Flood Response Project. Local Treasures has increased the number of participants in Bolton's outreach activities by 77%.

It isn't just about getting people through the doors; we are also working to promote wider access opportunities. The Whitworth Art Gallery is leading the way nationally in delivering learning programmes for 14-19 year old students and their tutors. A recent event was described by a tutor as "challenging, fascinating and informative and exceptionally relevant to A Level exam papers". This is going to be an important area to build on over the next two years when the Hub will need to deliver extensive learning programmes from early-years to 17-19s.



Conservation activity in Manchester Museum's Discovery Centre

Photography by Pauline Neild

A day in the life of...

JO BEGGS, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, THE WHITWORTH

There is no such thing as a typical day in my job. One day I might spend the whole day in the office filling in forms, the next I'm working with other members of staff to get the information I need for funding applications and proposals, visiting a potential sponsor or meeting with people within the University. It's an incredibly rewarding job.

I've been the Development Officer at The Whitworth Art Gallery for five years. It's a medium-sized art gallery with internationally renowned collections of fine art, textiles and wallpapers and serves both the University of Manchester and the public.

I came to the Whitworth because I thought this was an interesting challenge and because of a particular interest in the collections. It's

quite unique in the fact that it sits between the campus and the local communities of Moss Side and Rusholme, offering a really diverse audience and varied demands.

When I started here the Development Officer post was new so I came in with a clean slate – no inherited membership schemes or difficult sponsors. I was able to shape the way development at the Whitworth operated right from the start, which has been hugely rewarding.

I deal with all types of fundraising - trusts and foundations,

public funds including Arts Council England and The National Lottery as well as corporate sponsors. I'm a one-person department so getting everything done in a week is a real challenge.

The thing with development is that the job is never done – there is always more research you could do, always more applications you could make. I find it difficult to draw a line under a project and say 'that's enough' and move on to the next thing.

The Hub has a very positive impact on our work, enabling us to deal with some major infrastructure and staffing problems.

Renaissance recognises that regional museums are suffering from a long-term lack of investment and that getting things back on track will take time and money.

// A medium-sized art gallery with internationally renowned collections of fine art, textiles and wallpapers //

Through Hub funding we have already been able to address a staffing shortage in the area of ICT, build on our strengths in Further Education by appointing the only Post-16 training co-ordinator in the country and we're currently re-displaying the textile collection in a gallery where displays have remained unchanged for the past 15 years.

In addition, we're writing a new strategic plan with help from an external consultant, benefiting from a partnership post in the local LEA and undertaking an extensive programme of



// ... offering a really diverse audience and varied demands //

// The Hub Development Group has proved to be a strong force when it comes to lobbying external organisations //



Jo Beggs



The Whitworth Art Gallery

ART GALLERY

organisational learning and workforce development.

In the early days of the Hub a Development group came together for networking purposes. Development professionals tend to be quite sociable and are usually keen to work in partnership rather than in competition. The Hub Development Group has proved to be a strong force when it comes to lobbying external organisations. Where getting a meeting individually with, say, the Heritage Lottery Fund or the North West Development Agency is often difficult, people seem quite prepared to meet us as a group. This has led to some interesting partnership projects and a better understanding of needs and priorities on both sides.

Development is a challenge for all organisations. There are far more demands on all funders than they can meet. Most projects are deserving and it's a shame there isn't an endless pot of money to support them. Arts fundraisers are not only up against other arts organisations but all the other charities and deserving causes too.

There's also a huge problem in fundraising because many sponsors prefer funding trendy new projects rather than core work. Sadly, many arts organisations are not in a position to create additional work while they're struggling to maintain existing collections. In the past, some organisations have been too tempted by the promise of money to say no to funders, despite the fact that the additional funding diverts them from core aims.

I think we are learning to say no to things and make funding for our core work our key priority, but we have to learn to be more

creative in getting what we need and convince funders that their money is better spent supporting our existing work. I'm currently seeking funding for infrastructural and access developments and improvements and for our on-going exhibition programme.

We're very lucky; the staff team at The Whitworth work together really well, sharing information and keeping everyone involved in projects right from the start. This makes it a lot easier to pull information from all sources about an exhibition or event in the early stages of planning - often up to two years ahead of the activity taking place.

The best thing about my job has to be opening an envelope to find we've been awarded a grant, but I actually really enjoy the whole process of researching funders and making applications - particularly trusts and foundations. I love the fact that my job is all about learning new things. In order to write a good application or talk to a potential sponsor about a project you have to know the subject really well.

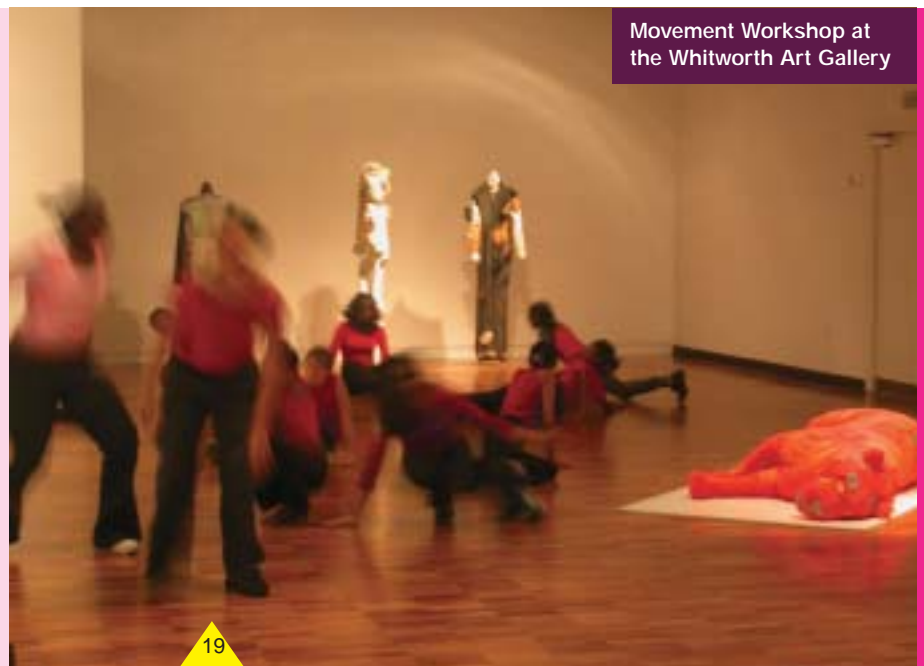
In the longer term it's great to see all the improvements to infrastructural projects, which will enable us to lever additional funding from external sources. It puts us in a strong position to say 'yes' to lots more exciting projects that come our way in the future.

Jo Beggs was interviewed by:

JADE WRIGHT

24-Hour Museum Student Placement to the North West Hub

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Movement Workshop at the Whitworth Art Gallery