Final Report on 'Benchmarking in the East of England' 2009-10

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1. Introduction

1.1 About Benchmarking

'Benchmarking Museums in the East of England 2009/10' is the tenth anniversary of an annual survey that provides data, mainly quantitative, on museums in the region covering a range of topics. The latest survey was broken down into 8 sections as follows:

1. Museum Information
2. Audiences
3. Resources (Finance, Staff and Volunteers)
4. Collections
5. Collections Care – Environmental Monitoring and Control
6. Collections Care – Storage and Housekeeping
7. Collections Care – Documentation
8. Staff and Volunteer Development

The majority of the narrative in this report focuses on the results provided by museums to the sections 'Museum Information', 'Audiences' and 'Resources' as comparisons can be made between the data collected under these sections and that collected during previous years of the survey.

1.2 Changes to Benchmarking in 2009/10

As noted in the previous report on Benchmarking (2008-09 results), responsibility for delivering the survey has changed hands a number of times and its content has also been updated and altered over time. A review of the survey began two years ago, with some initial changes being made to the questions for the 2008/09 form and extra checks being made to the responses to ensure that the resulting data was as reliable as possible. Changes to the survey's delivery and content continued this year. Indeed, 2009/10 is the first time that the survey has been delivered online (with museums still having the option to respond on paper if preferred). The benefits of this new method have been numerous and include the following:

- There was very little manual inputting of data to be done (only about 10% of the total responses chose to respond on paper) which saved a considerable amount of time. This also helped to prevent errors being introduced when data is manually inputted.
- Museums that had not responded by the initial deadline could be easily and centrally identified by checking the online survey results. These museums were reminded by e-mail, directing them again to the website, without the need to post out further forms or incur additional printing or postage costs.
- Museums were able to visit the online survey throughout the collection period to update or change their responses as necessary, allowing them to collate the necessary information over a period of time.

- Various settings were used when creating the survey so that respondents could not enter erroneous information (e.g. providing a figure that was impossibly high for the number of hours the museum was open) or provide textual information where only numerical data was required (e.g. ‘approx.’ 350). This meant that when the data was outputted into Excel, far fewer changes or checks had to be performed on the dataset before analysis could begin. This saved a considerable amount of time.

There have also been some disadvantages to this method, as follows:

- Three individuals were somehow able to overcome the survey settings so that each time they opened the link, this presented them with a fresh survey, rather than the one they had already started to complete. This was understandably frustrating for the individuals concerned and should not have been possible. Further investigations into the reasons for this are ongoing.
- Museums (particularly museum services) that needed to complete more than one survey (i.e. one per museum) could not do so online because of the settings created. It may be possible to rectify this in future.
- There was some confusion amongst individuals when completing the form online as to whether information was being saved as they entered it or closed the page. This can be easily rectified in future by including a ‘save and continue’ button at the bottom of each webpage.
- Museums did not have a copy of the information they had provided immediately upon submitting the survey (compared with a paper form which they could photocopy). This means it is doubly important to send all museums a copy of their results.

The changes to the content of the form that took place this year were with the support of Museum Development Officers in an effort to shorten the form and make it easier and more appealing to complete. In addition, Museum Development Officers reviewed in advance the list of museums to approach to participate, as the existing distribution list was not up-to-date. Museums were approached by e-mail (with the exception of a few for which we only had postal addresses) and were sent several reminders during the period that the survey was ‘live’.

1.3 Numbers responding to the survey

The target for this year was to achieve at least a 60% return from museums that are accredited or working towards accreditation. This was in fact surpassed with a return rate of 67%, up 12% on the previous year (**Table 1**). This can probably be explained by the changes just mentioned. It may be possible to improve on this figure again in future.

County	Number of responses	Number expected	% response rate
Bedfordshire	4	7	57

Cambridgeshire (incl. Peterborough)	25	28	89
Essex	19	38*	50
Hertfordshire	15	24	63
Norfolk	19	33	58
Suffolk	31	38	82
All	113	168	67

Table 1: Response rate to the survey by county (*Ipswich Museum and Christchurch Museum were included under Essex as these are part of Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service, and the respondent for the service included these museums under 'Essex')

2. Results and Discussion

2.1 Audience Figures

This section reports on the audience figures given by museums, including total visits, visits by school age children in organised groups, instances of outreach participation with school age children and instances of outreach participation with adults (see **Appendix 1** for a summary of the proportion that are actual vs. estimated figures). Where possible a comparison is made with the previous year, using constant samples[1], to assess where there have been changes in the number of museum audiences. Subsequently, any changes are set in context based on explanations provided by museums.

Total visits

Museums responding to the survey reported nearly 2.5 million visits in 2009/10 (2,427,724). The total number of museum visits in the region is likely to be much higher than this, given that about one third of museums did not respond to the survey, and some of these are larger local authority museums that usually report a significant number of visits. For example, collectively the hub museums that were not able to respond to the survey account for a further 804,536 visits, taking the total to nearly three and a quarter million. This is just over half of the total estimated population for the East of England in 2009[2].

There were 100 museums that were fully open during both 2008/09 and 2009/10 and that could provide total visit figures for these two consecutive years. This provides us with a constant sample for the period. The figures show an impressive 10.2% increase in visits between the two years. This increase is slightly greater than that for hub museums, which saw a 6.4% increase in total visits between 2008/09 and 2009/10 (constant sample)[3].

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the Benchmarking figures by county and demonstrates that the largest increase can be seen in Cambridgeshire (15.4%). In Cambridgeshire, the increase in visits is largely down to a small number of museums who cited that the staycation effect in 2009/10 improved their visitor figures. One museum also commented that they had counted rather than estimated their figures, which had resulted in a siginificant

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[1] A constant sample excludes museums from the sample for that particular question where there is missing data, for one or both years.

[2] The total estimated population for the East of England in 2009 was 5.8 million (source: Office for National Statistics). It is recognised that not all of the reported visits to museums will have been made by people living within the region, and indeed some people may have made repeat visits. Nevertheless this comment is offered as a very crude assessment of market penetration. Market penetration can be considered as a measure of the degree to which a product or service (e.g. museum visit) is taken up compared to the total potential market for the product or service.

[3] Source: Renaissance Data Collection: Hub Results for 2009-10, October 2010. This source was also used for subsequently mentioned hub data figures.

increase and it possible that the total for Cambridgeshire and the percentage increase is being artificially inflated by this one museum's situation.

	No. in sample	Total visits (cs)		Difference	
		2008/09	2009/10	(number)	(%)
Beds	3	78,658	83,780	5,122	6.5
Cambs, including Peterborough	21	780,112	900,422	120,310	15.4
Essex	19	379,989	415,900	35,911	9.5
Herts	13	129,636	132,434	2,798	2.2
Norfolk	16	384,097	406,325	22,228	5.8
Suffolk	28	395,313	427,101	31,788	8.0
Total	**100**	**2,147,805**	**2,365,962**	**218,157**	**10.2**

Table 2: Total visits (constant sample) in 2008/09 and 2009/10 by county.

Total visits, schools

The total number of visits by school age children in organised groups in 2009/10 was 177,183. Whilst this figure is lower than that previously reported for 2008/09 (192,088), the sample of museums responding to Benchmarking was not necessarily the same over the two years. Based on the responses to the latest survey, there were 85 museums that were able to offer their normal schools programme during both 2008/09 and 2009/10 and that could provide total visit figures for these two consecutive years. The figures show a steady 1.3% increase in visits between the two years.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of these numbers by county and demonstrates that the largest increases can be seen in Suffolk (5.8%) and Norfolk (5.6%). Nationally, school visits by Yr1-11 pupils went down in number between 2008/09 and 2009/10 in a constant sample of hub museums. In a constant sample of East of England hub museums there was a 0.7% decrease in this figure.

	No. in sample	Total visits, school age children (cs)		Difference	
		2008/09	2009/10	(number)	2008/09
Beds	2	536	551	15	2.8
Cambs	18	69,694	70,080	386	0.6
Essex	16	35,715	34,493	-1222	-3.4
Herts	12	12,419	12,610	191	1.5
Norfolk	14	28,244	29,823	1579	5.6
Suffolk	23	20,270	21,437	1167	5.8
Total	**85**	**166,878**	**168,994**	**2116**	**1.3**

Table 3: Total visits by school age children (constant sample) in 2008/09 and 2009/10, by county.

Outreach, instances of participation by children and adults

At first glance, outreach figures have shown a significant rise. Last year (2008/09) there were a total of 50,507 instances of participation by school age children in museum outreach activities. This year (2009/10) the same total is 129,513. Similarly the total figures for instances of adult participation in museum outreach were 36,619 (2008/09) and 94,046 (2009/10).

However, as already noted before, these may be based on different samples of museums over the two years. Using the responses to the latest survey, there were respectively 53 museums and 70 museums that were able to provide complete figures for child outreach and adult outreach for these two consecutive years (**Tables 4** and **5**)

Using these constant samples, instances of child outreach have increased by 7.7% year-on-year and instances of adult outreach have increased by 16.1% year-on-year. Comparable figures for hub museums in the East of England are not available because outreach is measured slightly differently.

	No. in sample	**Outreach: total instances of participation, children (cs)**		**Difference**	
		2008/09	**2009/10**	**n**	**%**
Beds	2	2,845	2,230	-615	-21.6
Cambs	14	6,301	8,884	2,583	41.0
Essex	8	21,641	22,641	1,000	4.6
Herts	7	14,774	16,969	2,195	14.9
Norfolk	8	3,737	3,352	-385	-10.3
Suffolk	14	8,840	8,545	-295	-3.3
Total	**53**	**58,138**	**62,621**	**4,483**	**7.7**

Table 4: Total instances of participation in outreach by school age children (constant sample) in 2008/09 and 2009/10, by county

	No. in sample	**Outreach: total instances of participation, adults (cs)**		**Difference**	
		2008/09	**2009/10**	**n**	**%**
Beds	2	2,670	7,996	5,326	199.5
Cambs	16	4,753	5,508	755	15.9
Essex	13	8,909	8,180	-729	-8.2
Herts	9	8,824	8,041	-783	-8.9
Norfolk	11	3,356	4,738	1,382	41.2
Suffolk	19	5,461	4,980	-481	-8.8
Total	**70**	**33,973**	**39,443**	**5,470**	**16.1**

Table 5: Total instances of participation in outreach by adults (constant sample) in 2008/09 and 2009/10, by county

The overall trend therefore is that the region's museums are delivering higher audience figures all round, that means both in-reach (visits) and outreach (services delivered off-site).

2.2 Explanations of Audience Figure Trends

Museums were provided with an opportunity to explain trends in their visitor figures between 2008/09 and 2009/10. Many did so, resulting in some very informative comments that help to give further context to the results reported in **Tables 2-5**. The key points are discussed below.

The resounding message is that an investment in resources (both in terms of staff and other outputs such as exhibitions, events, learning programmes etc.) is closely aligned with an increased number of people taking up the services on offer. Where this investment is withdrawn, museums report a noticeable reduction in their audience numbers.

For example, several museums reported that specific temporary exhibitions drew in more audiences. Strategic and focused management, such as developing a dedicated audience plan and employing staff members to deliver on this element of business can be shown to have a positive impact on visitor numbers

Where schools are concerned, museums often reported that investment in their schools programme, usually through a dedicated education officer or volunteer, resulted in an increased number of school visits:

Conversely where such support was lost, museums suffered and school visit numbers dropped – in some cases, quite significantly.

Several museums reported that the number of visits had suffered due to the economic climate and in the case of school pupils this may also have been because of transport costs associated with travelling to the museum.

Despite the difficult economic climate, there was a strong sense from museums that they are clearly committed to building audiences, through improved or increased publicity and/or by widening what they can offer (e.g. targeted events and activities), both to schools and the general public.

Successful targeting of 'new' audiences is not only apparent in activities on-site, but is also clearly borne out by the outreach figures reported in **Tables 4** and **5** earlier, particularly adult outreach. In the last report on the Benchmarking survey (for 2008/09 data) it was noted then that there was a very definite trend towards increased outreach figures and Museum Development Officers ascribed this in part to improved recording of data. Whilst this may also be applicable with the figures for 2009/10, there is a strong sense that museums are increasingly branching out and delivering outreach activities to offer a more complete package of services that will attract new audiences. In some instances, the activity is linked to discrete projects but in others, the museums are simply offering more outreach opportunities.

And additional explanation for changes in audience numbers is the weather. Although this is often given as a reason year-on-year, the effects of the weather should not be underestimated, particularly in the case of smaller museums holding outdoor events which they rely on to achieve a significant proportion of their total yearly visits. Poor weather can in fact affect museums in differing ways – in certain circumstances it can encourage people to visit museums as an indoor activity, at other times it can mean there are fewer visitors, particularly on event days at open-air sites. For museums in tourist areas, prolonged bad weather can also mean a reduction in visits.

2.3 Museums' use of separate space or room for 'education' purposes

Museums were asked if they have available a separate space or room to use for meetings, activities or school groups.

Of the total number that answered this question (n= 111), 47 museums answered 'no' and 64 answered 'yes'. Despite the fact that around 40% of museums do not have a dedicated space or room to deliver education activities, these venues are still able to account for 13.7% of all school visits.

2.4 Museum Resources (Financial, Staff and Volunteers)

Museum services responding to the survey provided data on their resources as service-wide figures. It should also be noted that financial information is provided by museums based on financial years that cover slightly different periods. Where comparisons are drawn below, this is based on different (not constant) samples; therefore the number of museums in each sample is always cited.

Revenue and Staff Costs

The total annual revenue costs reported by 93 museums responding to the question were just over £24 million. This compares with £23.2 million in 2008/09 reported by 95 museums. These figures are used below to calculate cost per visit.

Furthermore, 63 museums provided information that indicated they spent nearly £14.3 million on staff costs. The comparable figure for 2008/09 is £14.1 million (based on a sample of 61 museums).

Annual income

The total annual income, excluding time specific project grants, came to £16.8 million (amongst 95 museums). This compares to £16.5 million in 2008/09 (reported by 94 museums).

Broadly, this financial information indicated that revenue and staff costs have remained constant.

Project Income and Sources

Almost £11 million pounds (£10,925,195) was secured by 72 museums in the region in 2009/10. This includes the £5 million awarded to one museum for an extension and redevelopment work which has now been completed.

Indeed, museums accessed funding from an impressive range of sources which have been summarised below.

Local government grants and sponsorship:

Many museums simply stated that they had received support from local government, those that were specifically mentioned include:

- Suffolk County Council
- Babergh District Council
- Sudbury Town Council
- North Herts District Council
- Hertfordshire County Council Locality budget
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Fenland District Council

'Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities' was a local authority funding stream accessed by one museum in Suffolk. 'Parish councils' were also mentioned several times, Redbourn Parish Council was specifically cited by one museum.

Central Government:

- DCMS (including Strategic Commissioning Funding through 'Partners in Time' and 'Learning Links')
- Future Jobs Fund (DWP)

Arts/Heritage Funding:

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Big Lottery Fund (e.g. Awards for All)
- 'MLA' (e.g. Their Past Your Future) and 'Renaissance' (specifically mentioned were SHARE, including Beds and Herts Small Grants, and Museum Development Fund)
- Arts Council
- English Heritage
- Museums Association
- National Museums (e.g. Victoria and Albert Museum, British Museum, IWM)
- Association of Independent Museums
- PINTA museum acquisition funding (Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art)
- The Art Fund

County level museum funding / partnerships:

- Local Strategic Partnership (mentioned by one museum was a 'Lowestoft Together Grant')

- Cambridgeshire Museums Advisory Partnership
- Museums in Essex Committee
- Association for Suffolk Museums
- Greater Fens Partnership
- Mildenhall Community Partnership

University grants:
- University of Cambridge
- Anglia Ruskin University

European Funding:
- Local Action Group funding (LEADER funding) – European Union
- Interreg Programme France

Charitable Giving
Several museums mentioned funding from their Museum Friends or Society as well as local history or local charities, 'private sponsorship', 'donations' and 'legacies'. Specifically noted were the following sources of charitable trusts or funds:
- Wolfson Trust
- PM Major Trust
- Harpur Trust (Bedford Charity)
- Home of Horseracing Trust
- Heveningham Hall Charitable Trust
- Bernard Matthews Fund
- East Anglian Art Fund
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- J P Getty Jnr Charitable Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- The Foyle Foundation

Other funding sources:
- Royal Society Grant
- Grassroots small grant (Community Development Foundation)
- Essex Police Authority
- Suffolk Life
- Newmarket Fine Art

Paid Staff

Amongst 52 museums that responded to the question, there are 278 FTE members of paid staff, this equates to a mean of 5.3 per museum.

There were a total 38 FTE project staff reported by 21 museums, this equates to a mean of 1.8 per museum. However, this total figure does not seem to be reliable and should be used with caution, particularly as there some larger museums that were unable to complete the survey that employ project staff.

Volunteer Staff

There were 94 museums that provided information on the number of volunteers (**Table 7**). This totalled 3,991 volunteers (or an average of 42.5 volunteers per museum). In 2008/09, there was a mean of 51 volunteers per museum. There were 88 museums that provided information on the number of hours given by volunteers to their museums. This totalled 466,853 hours (or an average of 5,305 hours per museum. The comparable mean for 2008/09 was 3,472 hours.

This suggests that on average, the number of volunteers has gone down over the two years, whilst the mean number of volunteer hours has increased, i.e. there are fewer volunteers overall but working more hours in total. This point is made tentatively however, as volunteer statistics are often estimated by museums.

Based on guidance from Volunteer England about calculating the equivalent financial value of work carried out by volunteers, 466,853 hours equates to an impressive £4.2 million invested in museums in the East of England during 2009/10[4]. This figure is likely to be an underestimate of the actual total, since there are more regional museums being supported by volunteers than were counted by this survey (some museums are known to find it difficult to respond to the survey because they are wholly volunteer run and do not have the resources).

	Number of volunteers			**Number of hours worked by volunteers**		
	Total	Mean per museum		Total	Mean per museum	
Beds	152	51	*(26)*	84,854	28,285	*(1,190)*
Cambs	757	40	*(128)*	63,527	3,529	*(2,771)*
Essex	574	36	*(37)*	30,584	1,912	*(2,612)*
Herts	454	35	*(32)*	43,548	3,629	*(2,646)*
Norfolk	620	44	*(31)*	71,597	5,966	*(2,927)*
Suffolk	1434	49	*(43)*	172,743	6,398	*(4,996)*
Total	3991	42	*(51)*	466,853	5,305	*(3,472)*

Table 7: Summary of total and mean number of volunteers and total and mean hours they gave to museums in 2009/10 by county. Figures given in brackets and *italics* are for 2008/09 and are provided for purposes of comparison. Please note that in 2008/09 figures for Bedfordshire were for one museum only.

Visits per hour

Visits per hour ranged from 0.7 visits per hour up to 167.9 visits per hour, these averages were dependent on the 'size' of museums; the larger local

[4] The exact figure is £4,234,357. Based on advice from Volunteer England, when working out an hourly rate it is best to take a value between the national minimum wage (£5.80 for workers over 21 from October 2009) and the median hourly wage (£12.34 in November 2009, Office for National Statistics). In this instance, the hourly rate was therefore taken to be £9.07.

authority museums were more likely to achieve a higher number of visits per hour. The mean number of visits per hour (from a sample of 103 museums) was 15.5. The year previously, this mean was 15.3 visits per hour (from a sample of 101 museums). There has been little change therefore over the two year period in this measure.

Cost per visit

In 2009/10, the calculated cost per visit ranged from £0.10 per visit to £54.21, based on a sample containing 84 museums. The average cost per visit was £8.06. This mean is the same as the previous year, based on a sample of 95 museums (an 'approximate' mean since it was based on financial information that was not wholly reliable).

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made should the Benchmarking survey continue in the future.

1. It would be advisable to review the questions on the survey for 2010/11, particularly those covering collections, since it was intended that these sections be used in 2009/10 to obtain a snapshot of the health of museums' collections with a view to planning the provision of future support. Museum Development Officers, in conjunction with other staff (e.g. the Regional Museums Development Manager), should consider what topical issues they may need baseline information on for planning or advocacy purposes.

2. The survey should be delivered online for the reasons given in Section 1.2 of this report. It is recommended that some desk research is undertaken looking at the different online survey software available and its suitability in terms of functionality and cost. If it is deemed best to use Survey Monkey again in the future, then the survey should be set up and tested to rectify the initial teething problems outlined in Section 1.2.

3. Museums were very forthcoming when it came to explaining trends in their audience data and this has been particularly useful in demonstrating the importance of investment in the sector. Some museums provided quite detailed comments about their situation that were particularly helpful in understanding the positive changes they were making to their organisations. In future, it could be beneficial to supplement the question *'What may have influenced any changes in the figures provided above between 2008/09 and 2009/10?'* with a question that asks museums to provide positive news stories that they would like to publicise to a wider audience.

4. Benchmarking data now exists for a 10 year period. The survey has not remained the same over time in terms of its content or terminology but there may be some consistency in information that would allow for certain results to be collated. Completion of this work would be advisable if there was an appetite amongst museum professionals for insight into how the region's museums have developed over the first decade of the millennium, and a desire to demonstrate these changes to stakeholders. It is telling that until recently, the West Midlands believed (and claimed) it had the only region–wide survey of museums in place.[5] This demonstrates that there is a need to raise the profile of Benchmarking and to have ready a complete dataset containing the full 10 year's worth of returns.

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[5] *"The West Midlands region remains the only one to have a tradition of mapping museum development and therefore has been able to demonstrate how standards, services and practice have improved over time. It is West Midlands wide, the only museum research of its kind in England, with approaching 10 years of data allowing for longitudinal analysis."* (source: Brief for Fast Forward 2010 Survey and Analysis)

5. At least four years ago, when MLA East of England was in place, there were discussions about offering training to museums that supported the Benchmarking survey. This was to demonstrate to museums not only how the information they supplied was used centrally, but also how the museums themselves could put it to better use. The rationale was that museums would be more likely to respond to the survey if they could see both purpose and value in collecting the data which it asks for. Having analysed the returns for the past three years, and through general conversations with regional museums, there now certainly seems to be an audience for this type of training; museums appear to be more conscious of the need to utilise information to demonstrate where investment is paying off. If point 4 above is implemented, it is recommended that offering training to museums in the use and collection of their annual data would also help to realise the full potential of a longitudinal dataset and continued support for Benchmarking.

6. Given the improved response rate to the survey achieved this year by accredited museums or those working towards accreditation (67%), it would be reasonable to aim to develop this further by setting a feasible target for 2010/11 of between 70% and 75%.

Appendices

Appendix 2: Proportions of Audience Figures that are 'Actual'

The vast majority of audience figures provided by museums in 2009/10 is based on actual counts:

	Visits	Visits, school age children organised groups	Instances of outreach participation, school age children	Instances of outreach participation, adults
Total reported	2,427,724	177,183	73,797	42,033
Total that are actual	2,295,821	169,305	48,754	31,777
% that are actual	94.6%	95.6%	66.1%	75.6%