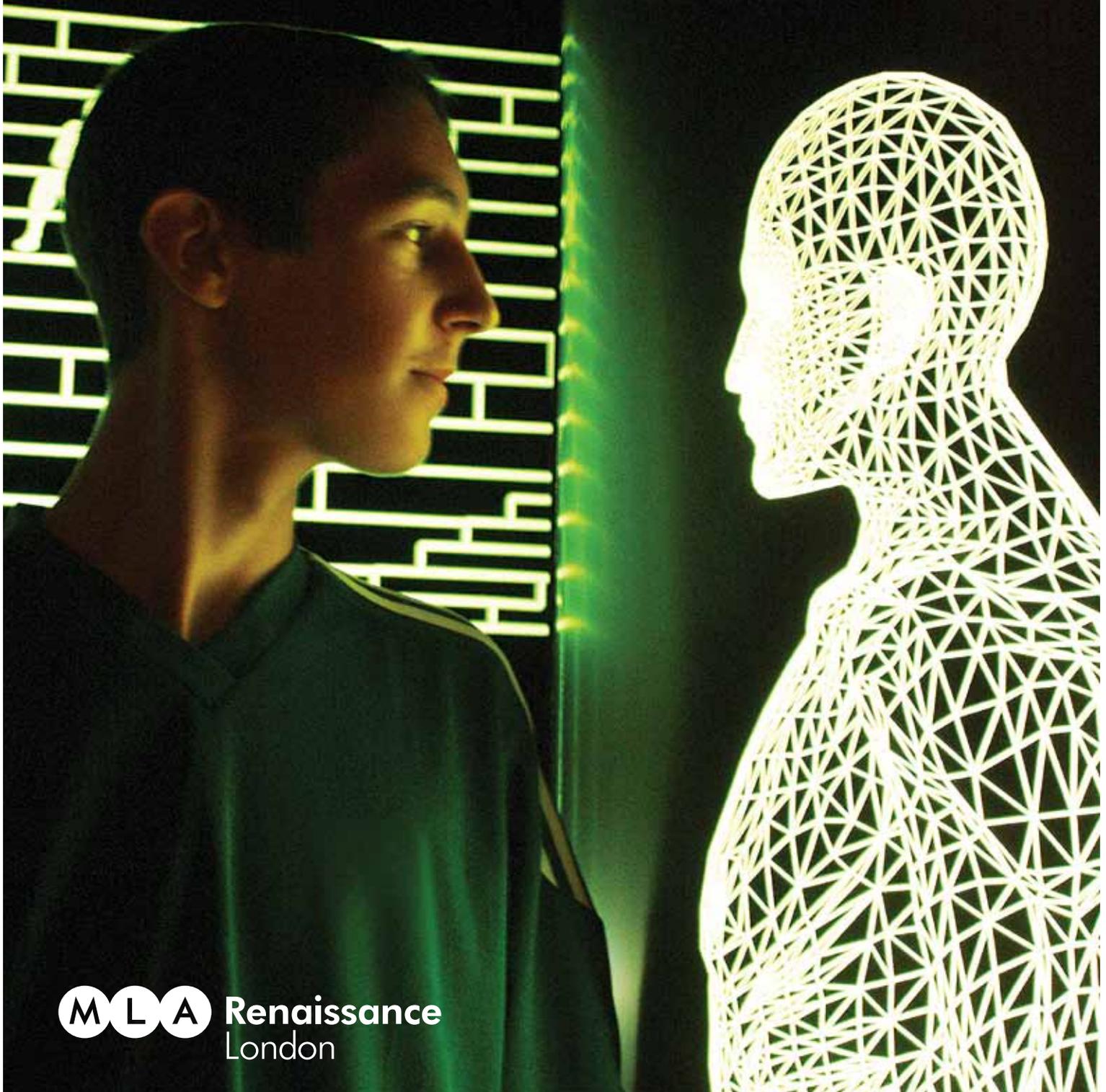


London Museums Hub Information and Records Management Project

Case Study 2007–2011



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1 Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to make a detailed record of the project methodology, findings, products and lessons learned.

1.1 The London Museums Hub

The London Museums Hub is a consortium of four London museums funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) as part of the Renaissance in the Regions programme. The aim of this funding programme is to enable the full realisation of the potential of regional museums in England. The London Hub is one of nine regional hubs in England and consists of:

- Museum of London (lead partner)
- Geffrye Museum
- Horniman Museum
- London Transport Museum.



1.2 Background to the project

The project, which began in 2007, was funded by the Renaissance London programme under the auspices of the MLA. It was designed to deliver sustainable and practical solutions to the issues of information and records management in museums.

The project has:

- reviewed the state of the sector in relation to information and records management
- provided practical help in getting information and records management started in the Hub museums
- provided training for museum staff and volunteers in the London region
- provided free consultancies to regional museums
- set up a forum for museum information and records management
- provided free museum specific toolkits, e-learning tools and factsheets to enable staff to tackle information and records management in their museums beyond the life of the project.



1.3 Need for the project

Although museums are inherently information businesses, their information is often generated at local, departmental or project levels with specific targets and outputs in mind. Whilst this approach may meet immediate information goals, it does not always take into account the overall business needs of an organisation or its potential future requirements. This situation can result in uncoordinated systems, information duplication and an inability to consistently locate or amalgamate relevant information sources. It can also lead to missed opportunities and a restricted ability to innovate.

A survey conducted at the outset of the project indicated that organisation wide information management was uncommon in museums.

There was a similar lack of awareness of the need to manage non-collections related records in the museum sector. The introduction of information legislation such as the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) extended legal responsibility for managing records. In order to comply with this legislation, museums need to know what records they have where, who is authorised to access them and for how long to keep which records.

Records management guidance was easily accessible for the generic records most common to organisations, such as human resource and financial records. However, little sector-specific advice was available prior to the project, a working group of museums and galleries archivists had developed a *Generic Museum File Plan* but this was unpublished and not widely available in the region.

2 What did we do?

At the outset we created two separate projects: *Information Management, Policy and Strategy* and *Improving Records Management* and ran them in parallel. They were subsequently merged to form one project which sought to improve information and records management within the Hub and the wider region.

2.1 Methodology

The project was delivered over three phases:

Phase 1 – Survey (2007–2008)

In this phase, both project strands focused on scoping the work required and investigated the current status of information and records management within the Hub museums.

The Information Management strand assessed the use of information policies in the Museum and Higher Education sectors.

It also conducted a series of interviews with Hub staff to identify organisational priorities, existing strengths and weaknesses of their information management activities and the broader corporate opportunities and concerns which existed in relation to information capture, management and use.

This work led to the creation of an Information Policy Framework designed to assist museum staff with determining the need for, and the development of an information policy for their organisation.

For the second strand, records management data was collected via manual analysis of policies and procedures and consultations with 41% of Geffrye Museum staff, 32% of Horniman Museum staff, 29% of LTM staff and 44% of MOL staff to get a representative sample. Detailed issues and recommendations relating to specific departments were specified in a *Strategic Report to the Hub Museums* delivered in April 2008.

Phase 2 – Implementation (2008–2009)

This phase concentrated on implementing good practice and sought to address the issues identified during the first phase.

The Information Policy Framework was used to assist each museum with the process of implementing information policies and the findings from the *Strategic Report* were used to inform records management action plans for each Hub museum. The project also created e-learning tools to support awareness.

A project Steering Committee was established comprised of the key stakeholders given formal responsibility for information and records management in each of the museums.

Phase 3 – Increased Regional Focus (from 2009)

In the third phase, the project strands were brought together to roll out the lessons learned in the Hub museums to the region. This was achieved through the production of freely available toolkits, a regional training programme, and free records management consultancies for regional museums, which were allocated through an application process followed up by a preliminary visit and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding.

To ensure that the project's guidance was appropriate and approved by the information and records management communities as well as the museum sector, all products were peer-reviewed prior to publication. Peer reviewers were recruited not only from different sectors and organisations, but also from a range of different levels in the organisations, thus reflecting the diverse audience. This also ensured that key individuals in the museum and records management world were aware of the project and its products, which helped to raise general awareness of the project in the sector and gave the products added authority.



3 What did we deliver?

Overall, the Information and Records Management project has significantly raised awareness and capacity for information and records management across museums in the London region and beyond. The mixture of in-depth support to the Hub Museums, regional training, guidance materials and free consultancies has turned information and records management into a recognised ongoing activity in many museums across the London region.

Project Benefit Summary 2007–2011	
Total number of museum staff in London region trained (including Hub museums)	688
Total number of London museums benefited by the project	149
Total number of regional consultancies delivered	15
Total number of training sessions delivered	24
Total number of known policies and procedures now in place, where none existed previously	35
Total number of freely available sector-specific guidance materials developed by the project	15

Initially, the project was managed by a Hub committee consisting of senior representatives from each of the Hub Museums. Subsequently, a Steering Committee of practitioners from each museum was established to meet quarterly to review project progress and to set its overall direction. As the project focus moved towards regional museums, the remit of the Steering Committee shifted to sharing skills and experiences of implementing records management. To reflect the change in focus, a representative from the regional museums joined the committee in 2010. The project delivered the following outputs:

3.1 Information Policy Framework

The Information Policy Framework was created 'to provide a basis for each of the London Hub museums to answer key questions about the way in which they create, manage and use information' (Alice Grant Consulting, 2009, p1). These questions were:

- What do museums need to know to succeed in their aims?
- What information do museums need to support this knowledge?
- How do people need to interact to use this information effectively?

The ultimate aim of the Framework is to give museums a set of policy areas, objectives and outcomes designed to cover the major elements that need to be considered in order to write and implement an information policy.

3.2 Toolkits

Information Policy Toolkit

The Information Policy Toolkit is based on the findings of the Information Policy Framework and the results of the work with it in the Hub museums. It contains practical guidance designed to support museums with the creation of organisation-wide information policies.

The toolkit is comprised of the aforementioned Information Policy Framework with guidance on its use. The kit sets out the benefits of an information policy, enables the user to make a business case for information management, and walks the user through the steps of policy implementation.

The toolkit contains:

- e-learning tool on information management aimed at senior non-specialist staff to raise awareness of key principles and issues
- guidance on conducting an information audit
- practical examples of audit responses and how to translate them into an information map of the organisation
- methodologies for gaining institutional support.

Records Management Toolkit

The Records Management Toolkit is a practical introduction to museum records management. It is aimed at museum staff without formal records management qualifications who need guidance to improve record keeping in their organisations, and comprises step-by-step instructions on how to implement a records management programme.

It includes museum-specific samples of all the components of a records management programme, which are easily customisable by museums:

- sample records management policy
- sample file plan
- sample retention schedule
- sample training session plan and materials
- awareness raising e-learning tools on records management and the Data Protection Act.

3.3 Fact sheets

Based on project experiences with the Hub and regional museums, nine key subjects were identified and fact sheets were developed to offer an easy, jargon-free insight into the basic elements of records and information management. The fact sheets provide a quick reference to staff at different levels in the museum to promote records and information management in theory and practice. Fact sheet topics include:

- Museum Records Management – Why should museum staff care?
- Museum Records Management – Why should museum managers care?
- Museum Records Management – What should you keep?
- Museum Records Management – Version Control
- Museum Records Management – Document Naming
- Museum Records Management – Managing and storing emails
- Information Management – How knowledge, information and records fit together
- Information Management – What is an Information Audit?
- Information Management – What is an Information Policy?

3.4 E-learning tools

A suite of three e-learning tools was developed to provide quick, high level sector-specific guidance on information and records management:

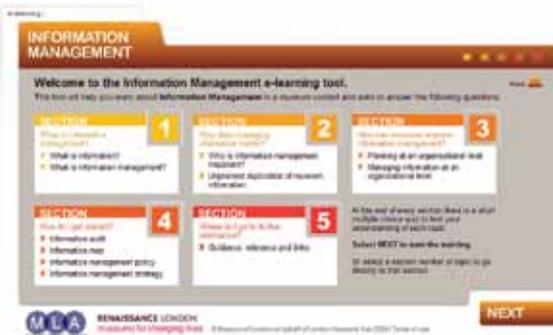
- Museum Records Management



- Data Protection for Museums



- Museum Information Management



All of the e-learning tools were a response to sector demand voiced during the work with the Hub museums and in regional training sessions. Each of the tools is customisable to reflect organisation-specific information and terminology. The purpose of all the e-learning tools is to gain mandate from senior management, raise awareness across a museum, deliver consistent induction training, and provide terms of reference.

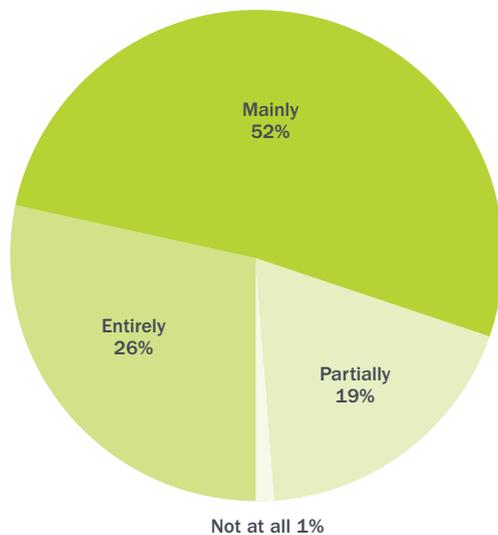
3.5 Training

The Information Management strand offered training workshops based on the Information Policy Toolkit to museum professionals in the London region. The primary purpose of the training sessions was to assist museums with the initial steps required to implement organisational information policies; particularly the need for gaining mandate, the various ways in which an information audit can be conducted and how the actual policy should be developed. The training was delivered in conjunction with case studies from the Museum of London.

“It gave me some practical tools and resources to take back to my colleagues and create an IM policy that works for us.”

Anonymous, Improving Museum Information Management 2010

Excerpt from training evaluation



The Records Management strand delivered ten introductory one-day training workshops on the basics under the title 'Nuts and Bolts of Museum Records Management'. In 2010 they were followed up by two half-day workshops focussing on implementing specific elements of a records management programme.

“Now have a very clear basis for developing RM policy for our institution and aware of the difficulties/possibilities. Also aware that other people are in a similar position!”

Mary Duffy, Objets D'Art Administrator, Army & Navy Club, Implementing Records Management I 2010

The regional training workshops were very popular with museum professionals both in, and outside the London region. In the first couple of years most training events were oversubscribed. The majority of attendants (80%) felt that they will be able to put the learning into practice in their museums either 'entirely or mainly.'

“An excellent overview and informative. Easy to understand and organised well.”

Emma Anacootee, Volunteer, Bishopsgate Institute, Nuts and Bolts of Museum Records Management 2011

3.6 Communicating the project

Ways Forward in Information Management for Museums Symposium

In spring 2009 the project held a one day symposium at the London Transport Museum to raise awareness of information management and to start a debate in the sector on the future of museums as information businesses. As part of the symposium, a booklet was published outlining the *Information Management Framework* and summarising key aspects of the projects to date.

Over 60 museum professionals from throughout the UK and beyond attended the conference. Among the participants were policy makers, librarians, documentation professionals, curators, digital resource experts as well as archivists and records managers.

Speakers included Claire Sussums (Museum of London), Alice Grant (consultant), David Thomas (Chief Information Officer, The National Archives), Catherine Hare (independent consultant), Tim Turner (ActNow), Christine Lalumia (Geffrye Museum), Sarah Demb (London Museums Hub) and Carol Seigel (Hampstead Museum).

Consensus building in the wider sector

Through the building of partnerships in the Hub and beyond, especially with organisations such as Collections Trust through the *CollectionsLink* website, the value of good information and records management has started to become more widely recognised in the museum community.

All of the project's products are published online and have thus reached audiences beyond the London region. The project was promoted to the larger heritage and records management sector through presentations at conferences and in articles in professional journals. As a result, the suite of e-learning tools has become popular beyond the museum profession both in the UK and abroad.

Community of practice

A community of practice was set up through a list-serv, which provided a discussion forum for those charged with museum information and records management. The listserv gained over 100 subscribers within the first three months of publicity on related mailing lists and networks, demonstrating a marked interest in exchanging ideas and experiences on information and records management in museums.

3.7 Consultancies

During the delivery of the 'Nuts and Bolts of Museum Records Management' workshops, participants expressed the need for more individual guidance on records management in their museums. To address this

need and to raise capacity for records management in the region, 14 free records management consultancies were delivered over 2009–2011. Consultancies consisted of two on-site visits, and help with formulating policies and procedures. Follow-up support was given through skills sharing sessions and ongoing provision of advice. This meant that close links were forged between the project and each of the participating museums.

“This [records management] had been on my list of objectives but I didn't even know how to begin. The consultancy has given us focus along with the specialist knowledge and advice.”

Handel House Museum

As a result, each of these museums improved their record keeping in at least one area. Some consultancies focused on the entirety of the organisation, while others concentrated on particular areas, such as conservation records or research notes, to improve their record keeping. The fact that the consultancies came from an external agency, (the London Museums Hub) appeared to make getting organisational buy-in easier.

“... through the training and advice we had the terminology to explain why we wanted to do this [records management] a lot better.”

UCL Museums and Collections

3.8 Impact on the Hub museums

Each of the four Hubs was at a very different stage in managing their information and records. The project was able to impact each museum accordingly by offering tailored support. For example, while one of the museums required support in developing policies, another needed help in agreeing filing structures.

The *Information Policy Framework* was used across the Hub museums in a number of different ways due to their different organisational cultures. Some carried out information audits (conducted via interviews by the consultant or through a process of self-audit using an online questionnaire), some used policy workshops or other projects such as the creation of an organisational intranet, as a starting point.

Each of the Hub information audits produced local information maps, which were then used to inform the development of information policies and associated procedures in the museums.

The findings of the *Strategic Report on Records Management* in the Hubs were used to inform agreed action plans for each Hub museum. Using the museum-specific action plans as a guide, the project supported the creation and implementation of records management policies and procedures in each of the museums. All staff in the Hub museums received training on good records management practice. Most significantly, each of the museums established formal responsibility for records management.

The project has put information and records management on the agenda of these very different museums. Each now has a records management policy in place, as well as related procedures such as file plans and retention schedules. Most crucially, responsibility for records management was assigned in each of the museums, showing long-term commitment to manage records effectively.

While the project has provided support, the Hub museums owned the activity throughout and are now able to progress according to their needs and resources. As a result, most staff across the Hub museums recognise information and records management as an ongoing activity in their museums; a near '180 turn' from the 2007 benchmark.

“The museum is now starting to be acknowledged as the place where records management sits, and we’re making progress with getting material [records] from different [...] departments they’re starting to understand the need for keeping and managing records for historical and other reasons.”

White Lodge Museum

4 What did we learn?

4.1 Developing the Methodology

The development of the methodology for the project was largely dependent on overall funding cycles and the lessons learned throughout the project phases. Time limited funding cycles meant that planning was necessarily short-term, which made it imperative that project outputs were geared towards sustainability within the Hub and the region. At the same time this made it difficult to connect to wider initiatives such as the services provided via the Hub's Museum Development Officers, with which we hoped to partner as an advice point for the region. However, this constraint meant the project could respond quickly to the needs of the sector and adapt its methodology according to the feedback from the sector.

4.2 Dual project stream

Initially the Information Management Project was supposed to provide the framework for the Records Management Project in which records management would be tackled as part of a broader *information strategy*. In practice within the dual stream approach, the Records Management project had a more immediate impact because it provided quick hands-on support.

The advantage was that highly visible 'quick win' activities demonstrated the immediate tangible benefits of records management to a large audience and provided a vehicle for communicating the benefits of improving information and records management. Conversely, records management became a parallel activity that ran the risk of becoming detached from an overall information strategy, rather than supporting it. Therefore, it was important to extrapolate the tangible benefits of records management to the broader information management context and use them as a way of raising awareness of the wider issues.



4.3 Responsibility is vital

It quickly became evident that implementing organisation wide information and records management without assigning formal responsibilities is impossible. Without formal responsibilities, progress depends entirely on initial momentum and while this is an important factor, it is not self-sustaining.

Staff need to know that they can trust any new system, and for that to happen, it is vital to have a 'go to' person with authority to make relevant decisions. Most of the Hub museums approached records management as a short-term project until it became evident that records need to be managed over the long-term.

The selection of a representative to join the Steering Committee was a first step towards accepting institutional responsibility for information and records management.

While the Hub project could support the initial steps and quick wins, the adaptation to good information/record keeping practices is a long-term process that each museum took on.

Where responsibilities were not clearly defined, information and records management was more vulnerable to staff transitions or short-term changes in priorities.

4.4 Senior managers need to be convinced

When implementing information and records management, it is vital that it is fully supported by senior management. This type of initiative needs to be communicated as an organisational policy or strategy to ensure that all staff take it seriously, and this is most effectively done if it comes from senior management.

For example, in museums where records are unmanaged, staff tend to establish *ad hoc* systems, which are not always useful over time across the organisation. At the corporate level, fundamental change to personal working habits needs to be endorsed and supported by senior management in order for staff to make the necessary transitions.

The initial change is often time consuming and can conflict with other demands; therefore staff need permission from senior management to take the time to review their record keeping practices. Without this remit from senior management, other tasks will often appear to have priority, and information and records management will be neglected.

5 What makes the project important?



5.1 Awareness

Although the project has raised awareness and promoted good practice in many London museums and some beyond the region, many in the wider museum community are still unaware of the need to manage information and records.

While museum professionals may know of the implications of the Data Protection Act, many museums are still getting up to speed with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), partly because it applies only to publicly funded organisations.

Nevertheless, in a climate where efficiency savings and transparency are top priorities, and where the Government is looking to expand the reach of FOI, information and records management should play an important role in all museums.

Planned management of information and records delivers efficiency savings in organisations of all shapes and sizes. The project has shown that sector-specific guidance can usefully serve a wide audience.

5.2 Information as a museum asset

In order for information policies to be implemented and records management to become a core activity in museums, these functions need to be understood as the management of organisational assets and the preservation of institutional memory. As information increases exponentially while remaining vital for museum operations, it must be managed effectively to maximise the museum effectiveness and reputation.

In order for this to become more widely recognised and translated into standard practice, information and records management has to become a core part of museum functions alongside managing other assets such as finance, buildings and collections. For the museum sector to embrace information and records management, it needs to become part of accepted standards, such as the requirements for accreditation.

6 Conclusion

The Hub Information and Records Management Project successfully raised a significant degree of awareness and capacity in the regional museums of London.

Moreover, the project developed museum-specific products designed to be available and usable beyond the project's lifetime.

The project has reached 149 museums directly to varying degrees.

All four of the Hub museums have changed the way in which they approach information and records; it is now recognised as crucial to their operations.

Although the project has reached many museums, it has not always been easy to communicate, especially within the information management strand. While some operational records management activities could be quickly taken on by staff at any level in the museum, the information management strand needed to reach senior management without being able to offer the same immediate tangible benefits as records management.

Evaluation of the work in the Hub Museums has shown very clearly that management and staff have changed the way they understand museum information and records. This is a remarkable success for a project with a limited capacity due to the specialist skills needed; it could not rely on the many available non-museum professionals to communicate museum-specific benefits, and so had a narrower reach than some of the other regional initiatives.

In order to effect sustainable changes and good practice, it will be vital to promote the key concepts as well as benefits and risks to senior museum management.

Ultimately, the implementation of effective information and records management can only be successful if supported by senior management.

In a time of tightening information legislation and flourishing digital resources, no museum can afford not to exploit their key asset – information.



Appendix

List of products and where to find them

Toolkits

- 1 Records Management Toolkit
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/toolkits/RecordsManagement.pdf
- 2 Information Policy Toolkit
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/toolkits/InformationPolicy.pdf

E-learning Tools

- 3 Records Management e-learning tool
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/resources/RMe-tool/
- 4 Data Protection Act e-learning tool
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/resources/DPAe-tool/
- 5 Information Management e-learning tool
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/resources/IMe-tool/

Fact sheets

- 6 Records Management in Museums – What is it? Why should museum staff care?
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/staff.pdf
- 7 Records Management in Museums – What is it? Why should museum managers care?
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/managers.pdf
- 8 Records Management in Museums – What should you keep?
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/ephemera.pdf
- 9 Records Management in Museums – Managing your email
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/email.pdf
- 10 Records Management in Museums – Version control
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/versioncontrol.pdf
- 11 Records Management in Museums – Naming your files and folders
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/naming.pdf
- 12 Information Management – How knowledge, information and records fit together
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/knowledge.pdf
- 13 Information Management – What is an Information Audit?
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/audit.pdf
- 14 Information Management – What is an Information Policy?
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/factsheets/policy.pdf

Listserv

- 15 Join at: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/museuminfo-records

Overview

- 16 Overview of all project products
www.museuminfo-records.org.uk/index.pdf

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