

THE BRITISH MUSEUM PUBLIC POLICY

1. Preamble

The public experiences The British Museum in many ways, not only by visiting the building and viewing the wonderful collections. The experience can range from contact with the staff of the Museum on official duties, business or as a visitor to reaction to public statements by or about the Museum. It is these experiences which determine the reputation of the Museum by the various groups who have an interest in its success. This reputation underpins the moral legitimacy of The British Museum's guardianship of cultural property and of the financial support of the Government and donors.

The British Museum has a collection of undisputed quality and world class expertise. These are the foundations upon which its reputation must be built and maintained. The principles which govern the accessibility of the collections and their cultural context are covered by the Display Policy. This Public Policy covers the other aspects of the experience of the Museum beyond its commitments in law under the British Museum Act 1963, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and other relevant legal requirements and addresses:

- \$ the public image (brand) the Museum projects
- \$ the way in which the buildings achieve architectural coherence and impact
- \$ how Museum content and information is organised and communicated.
- \$ the ways in which the relationships with the main stakeholders (including the visiting public) are handled.

This policy sets out the principles and standards which are to be implemented by all staff and the Board of Trustees to ensure that the Museum pursues a consistent and open approach.

2. Principles

2.1 Public interest and accountability

The Museum serves the public interest. As part of its public service the Museum is committed to open access to the permanent public display, to the study collections and to information about the Museum its collections and operations (save where it is not in the public interest that such information is disclosed).

The Museum will provide published information including its public opening hours in line with the needs of national and international visitors from all backgrounds. The Museum will charge or not for additional access and services in relation to its need and obligations with due regard to UK public funding, sponsorship and the terms of benefaction and ensuring that prices (whether for directly or indirectly provided services) are commensurate with the quality of provision. Although the Museum encourages visitors to make voluntary donations, and seeks visitor feedback and information on a without obligation basis, it will otherwise ensure that visitors are able to enjoy their time in the Museum free from unwanted or unsolicited approaches or interference from third parties.

The British Museum is accountable to Parliament and to government as primary funder and will operate a published procedure in relation to access to its operation as a public body. It will ensure that it consults on, understands and is responsive to changes in expectations of the discharge of this duty and the needs of its various publics, and fulfils the high standards expected in international relations.

2.2 Public relations and communication

There will be one corporate identity which will apply to all operations using The British Museum® in their name or product. The corporate identity will be associated with understanding of cultures, the fostering of good relations between them and scholarly integrity. This will define design standards in line with professional practice and fitness for purpose. Communication and marketing tools will be chosen to maximise public information and participation, including mature technologies and professional advertising where appropriate.

The Museum will neither undertake nor promote activities, including responses to the public interest, which are inconsistent with this corporate identity. The uses of the name of The British Museum and representations of its assets will be protected from unauthorised use by appropriate guidelines for collaborating organisations and appropriate trading registrations.

Commercial advantage will be pursued only in support of the Museum's mission and in a way which is consistent with its corporate identity and policies.

The Museum serves a broad constituency without distinction of race, gender, disability, social background, educational attainment or creed and incorporating the academic community, local residents and schools, national representatives and bodies, international visitors and experts. The Museum will provide published means of pursuing enquiries and defined levels of service. Insofar as it is not commercially sensitive, the Museum will place in the public domain significant research findings and information of relevance to wider study and public concern.

The way in which the Museum, or staff representing the Museum, communicates or presents itself to third parties will not raise expectations which we do not intend to deliver or that are inconsistent with public service and the corporate image, or its charitable status.

All published information will reflect actions or activities which either have taken place, are taking place in the Museum or are firmly planned to take place. The Museum will always wish to present itself in the best way but it will never avoid the truth however unpalatable.

The Museum will foster a constructive relationship with the media to enable public understanding of its purposes and to contribute positively to the development and discussion of cultural policy.

The needs of any one group will not be advanced to the exclusion of others except in the interests of security and health and safety. The British Museum will act to be impartial in political debate.

2.3 Physical environment

The British Museum will conserve and maintain the historic fabric of the buildings in its care to meet statutory obligations and as an exhibit in its own right. We will marry this with a layout which serves easy navigation and ensures access for all including those with disabilities and an approach to additions which represents the best of modern practice.

We will be prepared to exploit the commercial potential of the buildings as a venue for events and the development of external relationships in ways which are compatible with the safety of the collections and judged appropriate to our national and international position and reputation. The Museum will encourage high quality events which broaden public participation and cultural enrichment/exchange encompassing performance, art installation, debates and film. The Museum will neither host nor be involved in any event whose sponsor or content appears to support practices or values which are in conflict with the Museum's policies or corporate identity, such that external events with political purpose and/or direct commercial

outcomes (such as a product launch or fundraising event for another party) are unlikely to be accepted. Requests from recognised and attributed partners will be considered with due regard for hidden/additional costs, disruption of purpose and the needs of public access.

2.4 Organising and communicating the content of the Museum

The public spaces and displays are for the general visiting public. We serve the specialist interest and academic visitor through unparalleled access to our experts and reserve collections and those beyond our walls through complementary on-line materials and an active and open programme of tours and loans (in accordance with the Loans Policy).

Public programmes are designed to reach a wide range of audiences. The principles governing display are set out in the Display Policy.

We will provide strong and simple orientation so that each gallery is put into the broadest cultural, historical and geopolitical context. It will be easy to relate each case and individual objects to this broader information. Visitor Services will prioritise visitor safety and comfort acting within the parameters and practices defined by the Security and Health and Safety Policies and Procedures.

We will aim to identify and make available further sources of information and we will ensure that it is easy to navigate the Museum both physically, intellectually and on-line.

Priority will be given to design which aids the understanding and appreciation of the objects and cultures on display physically or electronically. Within these parameters and defined professional standards, diversity of design will be encouraged to enable different objects/cultures to be displayed to the best effect and to meet audience needs.

Information on gaining access to the study collections, as well as the opening hours for the public spaces and other published information, will be widely available. It will be our aim to ensure that we meet these commitments to access consistently. We will only fail to do so for defined operational or safety reasons and where possible we will ensure that these are publicised well in advance.

2.5 Developing relationships

All relationships will be handled:

- \$ with the highest integrity and professional standards as laid down in the Ethics Policy.
- with a view to building relationships and understanding between cultures and communities
- \$ with openness in making available our expertise and to other views and approaches.
- \$ seeking mutuality. The Museum will only undertake activities and obligations which support its objectives, but in doing so it will seek ways for the other party to fulfil their declared objectives;
- \$ constructively, looking for solutions to problems rather than obstructively defending short term interests;
- \$ courteously with sensitivity to the different needs of individuals and groups.

We will set standards of service (including appearance and behaviour) for those interacting with the visiting public which reflect these values and strive to be second to none among similar attractions in the UK. The operating language of The British Museum is English.

All partners or contractors who are interacting with the public on the Museum's behalf will be expected to meet the standards set out in this and other Museum policies.

The Museum will have an Access and Social Inclusion Strategy through which it will take steps to ensure that all groups are equally represented in the visitor base and ensure the removal of institutional, cultural and other specific barriers that might discourage or prevent participation by the widest range of constituencies.

3. Responsibilities

Certain departments have responsibility for ensuring implementation of those parts of the policy which apply across the museum namely:

The Managing Director and the Director are jointly responsible for allocating lead responsibility for coordinating the Museum's response on single issues in the public domain which effect the overall Museum interests or reputation.

Each Keeper and Director is responsible for defining their programme and approach in such a way that it positively supports the aims and aspirations expressed in this Policy.

The Marketing and Public Affairs directorate is responsible for:

- \$ the custodianship of the corporate identity, its definition and visual standards
- \$ communication with the general public including the design of overall navigation and orientation tools and of marketing materials/campaigns, the provision and standards of information, visitor services and public programming
- \$ communication with the media
- \$ appropriate commercial exploitation of the building for events and intellectual assets
- \$ setting design standards.

The Education Department is responsible for design and delivery of programmes to achieve educational outcomes.

The Operations Directorate is responsible for implementing the policy in respect of maintaining and developing the buildings and security of the collections as defined by the Security Policy.

The British Museum Development Trust is responsible for defining relationships and partnerships with donors and sponsors and ensuring that agreed undertakings are fulfilled.

The British Museum Company is responsible for commercial publishing, retailing and merchandising.

The Secretariat is responsible for the implementation of the Museum's governance procedures and legal assurance in relation to its activities and statutory duties.

4. Assurance

The following will be the main measures of successful implementation:

Surveys each year to track improvements or shortfalls in the general public's perception of how well the museum is meeting the above aspirations and the vigour of remedial actions.

Ongoing tracking of comment, complaint and service levels through standardised reporting

Positive media reporting of the Museum's activities and fair reporting of the Museum's point of view.

Continued Government funding relative to other national museums and support for the Museum's position on key international issues.

The Director will report annually to the Trustee Public Policy Committee on the implementation of the policy in the light of the above measures.

This Policy will be reviewed within five years.

Approved by the Board of Trustees 20 September 2002