

# THE BRITISH MUSEUM POLICY ON DISPLAY

## 1. Preamble

1.1 This policy is concerned with the entire range of displays created by or held in the British Museum, irrespective of length of time or the quantity of material included. It, therefore, covers single objects, special or touring exhibitions, permanent galleries and those exhibitions held at the British Museum that are wholly or partially constituted through loans.

1.2 The policy should, therefore, be read in conjunction with the existing documents on *Temporary Exhibition Procedures* and the *Loans Policy*.

1.4 It is also recognised that there is a close relation between physical display, and other forms of access, including remote electronic and printed forms. This policy should therefore be read in conjunction with the *e-Strategy*.

## 2. Purpose and Aims

2.1 It is the stated purpose of The British Museum to make available the objects in its collections to members of the public for their edification and enjoyment, subject to the constraints of maintaining the safety and security of the objects and the public at all times.

2.2 Public display is the most important means of fulfilling this obligation. All displays communicate the Museum's intellectual purpose and image.

2.3 The British Museum undertakes to display objects for the following purposes:

- to further knowledge and understanding of the world's cultures, both past and present, and their relationships to each other.
- to provide intellectual and visual stimulation and enjoyment for all visitors irrespective of their background, race, nationality, gender, disability or educational attainment.
- to generate support, by encouraging repeat visits and reaching out to new audiences.
- to promote good relations and better understanding between the cultures, races and nations of the world
- to enhance our international reputation as one of the great museums of the world and as a centre for scholarship.

Each display will satisfy as many of these criteria as possible and appropriate.

This policy sets out the principles which will determine how objects are selected for display and the standards which will govern this in pursuit of the above aims.

## 3. Principles

3.1 Displays must be able to meet the needs of audiences ranging from the casual enquirer to the specialist and provide different types of learning resources for different learning styles.

3.2 Displays are aimed primarily at the interested adult, but they may be accessible on a number of levels. Adults should be able to translate the displays to any others they may have with them

(e.g. a parent to a child; a school teacher to a party of children; a tour leader to a party of foreign visitors). The English used will be clear and readily understandable.

3.3 Additional assistance will be provided for specific groups to ensure access to displays. This may be available in a number of forms appropriate to the particular group (e.g. guided tours, audio guides in different languages, Education packs and COMPASS). All reasonable adjustments will be made for visitors with special needs (Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995; Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000). For those who request more detailed information we will make available our expertise in the most appropriate way (e.g. by enabling them to talk to an expert or visit a Study Room). The Information Centre will make it clear to visitors how they can get the additional help or information they desire.

3.4 Every display and gallery will have a definite theme or sense of context that furthers the purpose and aims set out above. How each object illustrates this theme will be made clear through the structured layout of the display, including the panels and the labels, as well as many other information systems. All texts will be easy to read and audio guide trails easy to follow.

3.5 The British Museum will display objects with integrity and a sensitivity to cultural differences. Information given will be reliable and up-to-date. Whenever it might reasonably be supposed that a particular object may cause offence to any particular class of visitor the Museum will take steps to warn visitors so that they may if they choose avoid those particular displays.

3.6 The primary displays will have high visual impact. The way the objects and cases are arranged will itself be visually stimulating. The objects will be selected on the basis of their ability to illustrate the diversity of the collections and the theme of the display in a vivid manner.

3.7 The British Museum will meet the public's expectations by ensuring that key objects are normally on display (save for occasions necessitated by conservation, security or study purposes), clearly sign-posted and easily accessible within the space constraints of the Museum.

3.8 Temporary displays will relate to the work and collections of the Museum in both national and international contexts.

3.9 Travelling exhibitions will reflect the British Museum's standards and intellectual values and will seek to encourage people to explore the wider range of the British Museum permanent collections.

3.10 All displays will be treated as projects and will be fully costed to reflect the real call on resources across the Museum, including any related infrastructural work. Each project will be delivered within this overall budget.

## **4. Responsibilities**

4.1 Every display project (including virtual displays) will have a Project Sponsor, either the Keeper of the Department or, in the case of a non-departmental or multi-departmental display, a delegated Keeper or other senior manager. The Project Sponsor is responsible for ensuring that the above Principles have been applied, that an appropriate project team is set up, that advice is received from all relevant sections of the Museum, and that Departments with responsibilities to deliver certain aspects of the total project do so within the overall timescale and budget.

4.2 The complexity and scale of a display may vary enormously. The Project Sponsor may therefore delegate his/her responsibility following the general principle that responsibility should be maintained at the lowest suitable managerial level.

4.3 The Director is responsible for judging whether the scale and importance of a display project warrant seeking advice from Trustees or others with specialist knowledge of design and architecture, and for seeking such advice.

## **5. Assurance**

5.1 Upon completion, the Project Sponsor will submit a final report assessing all aspects of the project and process.

5.2 The Exhibition Forum will ensure that monitoring and evaluating of designated displays takes place.

5.3 This Policy will be reviewed within five years

*Approved by the Board of Trustees 24 September 2002*