

Impact Report 2024/25



£945,526
has been invested
in museums through
our programme

301
museum and heritage sites
have benefited from our
support during the year

£160,520
has been invested by local authority
partners to enhance museum support
through our programme

61
museums received
tailored support to
develop their fundraising

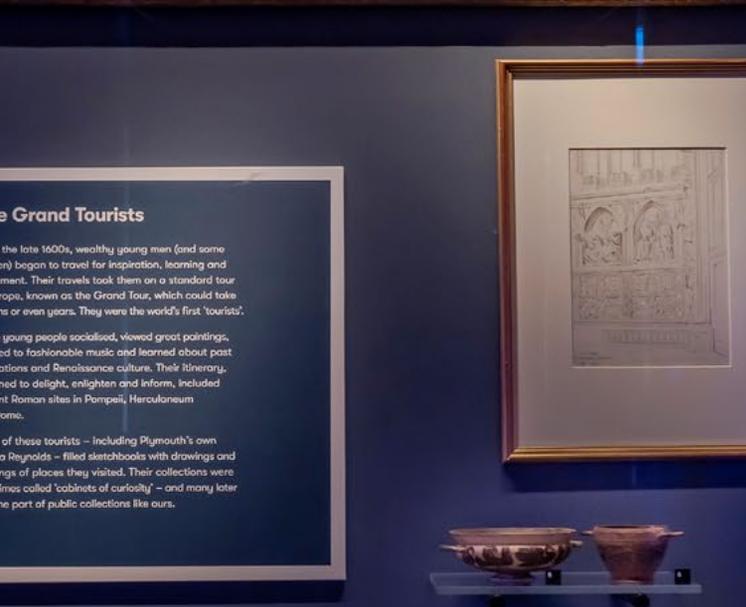
53
museums received
specialist support
in volunteer
development

101
museums received specialist
support to improve conservation
and collections care

We have awarded
£150,656
in grants to support
museum projects

637
delegates attended our
Museum Skills training

An annual grant of **£648,412** from Arts Council England
helped Museum Development South West unlock an
additional **£297,114** in income to invest in further
development opportunities



Letter from John Parkin, the second Earl of Sandwich, 1793
 Lord Sandwich (1726-1793) Lord of Sandwich Island, was a prominent landowner by an illustrious family of aristocrats of a young aristocracy. He was the first to introduce the Grand Tour to Italy and Switzerland. As the first British to travel around the world in 1771, he was the first to see the Grand Tour.

Wine jar from the Roman Amphitheatre of Larinum, Italy, 1st century AD
 The wine jar is a terracotta vessel, known as a *sigillata*, which was used for storing and transporting wine. It is decorated with a red slip and a black and red geometric pattern.

SOUVENIRS OF THE GRAND TOUR
 Grand Tourists collected souvenirs from the places they visited. These included coins, medals, and other objects. The vase shown here is a terracotta vessel, known as a *sigillata*, which was used for storing and transporting wine. It is decorated with a red slip and a black and red geometric pattern.

Clay jar with red slip, Greece
 This vase is a terracotta vessel, known as a *sigillata*, which was used for storing and transporting wine. It is decorated with a red slip and a black and red geometric pattern.

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Introduction from the Chair

Scope, Impact and Professionalism

Not everyone is privileged to see the bigger picture. Mostly we have our heads down doing the best we can in our own corner of the universe, our particular job role. As Advisory Board members, however, we get to observe the full scope of museum development activity carried out by Museum Development South West's professional team.

The exceptional range and quality of work undertaken by our dedicated Museum Development Officers and specialists is impressive – providing advice and guidance, Organisational Health Checks, training, grants, advocacy and Accreditation support to museums throughout the greater South West area.

In addition, there are innovative projects like Growing Together, our awareness- and confidence-building Equity, Diversity and Inclusion programme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). There's also national networking, data surveys, grant distribution and local authority liaison to be carried out, not to mention team management, reporting and accountability, all of which amplify the impact we can have.

It's an extraordinarily busy and productive programme made possible by the diligence and commitment of our people, ably led by Vic Harding. It's a privilege to witness this work and I pay tribute to all our team, and my Advisory Board colleagues, for their exceptional professionalism.

Stephen Boyce

Chair, Strategic Advisory Board





Note From Philip Walker

Since 2009, the Museum Development programme for the South West has been hosted by Bristol City Council, a partnership that has grown in strength and reach over more than a decade. This last year has seen MDSW undertake a new geographical remit to include Hampshire Solent (Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight), reflecting the Arts Council England South West Administrative Area.

The Strategic Advisory Board and team of staff, both existing and new members, have seamlessly embraced this transition and engaged many more diverse and hard-working museums to their exciting programme. In the current economic climate, this support is vital for fostering opportunity and best practice in museums of all shapes and sizes.

Bristol Culture and Creative Industries is proud to continue supporting this vital work, and we remain eager to see how the sector flourishes in the South West through the team's ongoing efforts.

Philip Walker

*Head of Culture and Creative Industries
at Bristol City Council*

Capacity building through skills development

SW Museum Skills & Forums

In 2024/25, our SW Museum Skills programme offered delegates a mix of online and in-person training, covering nearly every aspect of museum practice – from pests and hazards in collections to fundraising, audiences, volunteer engagement, and Accreditation. During 55 sessions we engaged over 637 delegates through forums, skills-sharing events, and expert-led training. An impressive 88% of attendees who completed evaluation reported learning new skills or enhancing existing ones.

Our in-person training was particularly well received, drawing museum professionals from across the new South West Area. To maximise access, we hosted training sessions across our new area which were well attended. The Introduction to Collections Care hands-on training quickly reached full capacity!

Our training sessions were developed and delivered by our specialist officers alongside expertise from partner and sector support organisations, ensuring our offer responds to the needs of museums in the south west. We continue to evaluate and adapt our offer to remain responsive, impactful and fulfilling.



88% of attendees who completed evaluation reported learning new skills or enhancing existing ones.

Communicating and amplifying the value of heritage

Annual Museum Survey

In October 2024, on behalf of Museum Development England, we released the results of the 2024 Annual Museum Survey (AMS), providing a comprehensive report on the operating context of museums in England.

The findings reveal that the cost-of-living crisis continues to place pressure on the sector, hindering museums' post-pandemic recovery amid rising costs and limited funding. Visitor numbers remain 8% below pre-pandemic levels nationally, though the South West shows stronger recovery, lagging by just 2%.

While donations and admissions income have grown by 27% and 20% respectively since 2019/20, overall income has risen by only 15%, falling short of a 20% rise in expenditure – underscoring persistent financial pressures.

The report reaffirms the indispensable role of volunteering in the museum sector, with more than a third of museums within the Accreditation scheme in England operating entirely on volunteer power.

Now in its eighth year, the Annual Museum Survey reflects the five new Museum Development England Areas in its reporting, continuing to provide a valuable source of information for advocacy, benchmarking and sector trends.

Cornwall Heritage Awards

The 7th annual Cornwall Heritage Awards (CHA) took place at Liskeard Public Hall on 17 March 2025. The breadth of Cornwall's museums, galleries, historic sites and archives were represented, with over 50 entries from 25 different organisations.

Winners and highly commended entrants were announced for the categories of Collaboration, Innovation, Best Project on a Budget, Heritage Heroes, Leader of the Year, Exhibition of the Year, and Spirit of the Awards. Object of the Year, by public vote, was won by Henry Trengrouse's lifesaving equipment at the Museum of Cornish Life.

Museum Development South West are delighted to support the CHA with funding from our Small Open Grant scheme and would like to thank Cornwall Council, the judges and sponsors for this joyful celebration of the creativity in Cornwall's museums and heritage organisations. Oll an gwella!



Connected and networked

Technical Accreditation Advisory Service

In April 2024 we developed our Technical Accreditation Advisory Service and welcomed two experienced, freelance advisors for the South West area. Tim Burge covers Cornwall to Wiltshire and Philip Claris covers Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight. Their role works closely with our team of nine local Museum Development Officers (MDOs) to support and advise museums and to undertake the eligibility and returns process for the Accreditation standard.

From April 2024 to March 2025:

- 67 museums engaged in the Technical Accreditation Advice service
- 24 museums achieved UK Museum Accreditation awards
- 10 museums were supported through the process of Working Towards Accreditation
- 3 new museum mentors were recruited

Alongside providing one-to-one museum support, our Technical Accreditation Advisors have also held online support and training sessions throughout the year. In collaboration with the Arts Council England national Accreditation team and other Museum Development England teams, they have supported the review of both the Accreditation guidance and Accreditation mentor handbook, alongside enabling MDOs to develop their technical accreditation knowledge.





Increasing inclusion and tackling inequality

E-Learning: The Equality, Diversity And Inclusion Roadmap

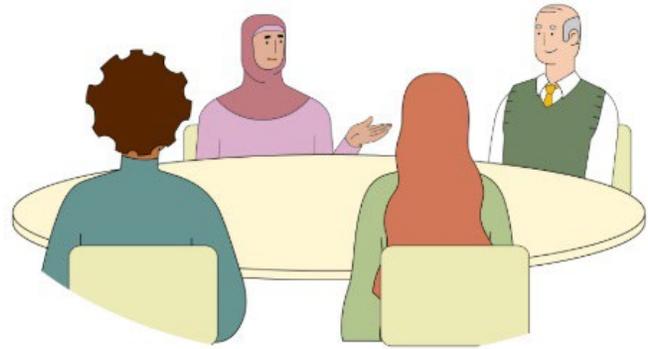
Drawing on our learning and practice developed in the Travelling Together project we launched an e-learning course, reaching museums across England through this online learning opportunity to develop and embed a deeper understanding of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). 36 individuals from the South West signed up for the training in the first two months.



With this strong response we engaged a wide range of participation, from staff in larger museum services, to trustees leading volunteer-run museums, and individuals working towards their Associateship of the Museums

Association. The resource has been used from London to Sunderland.

The *EDI Roadmap* was developed with expert consultants, including leadership from a steering group who brought lived experience and EDI expertise, alongside a diverse range of museum user testers. Through six modules, learners discover how to implement good EDI practice in many aspects of museum practice. We're delighted to continue this journey thanks to further investment from National Lottery Heritage Fund in our Growing Together project.



Iggy for all

From spring 2024, the arts company Emerald Ant worked in partnership with 12 Dorset and Somerset museums alongside the Somerset and Dorset, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Museum Development Officers to develop and deliver a multi-faceted project. The aim was to increase museum audiences and build museum capacity to provide disabled-friendly activities. The project attracted Arts Council England Unlocking Collections funding for staff and volunteer training around working with SEND children and families, as well as expertise and support for building disability-friendly creative activities around palaeontology collections.

The project has proved incredibly successful and outcomes will be sustained during 2025 through the delivery of a unique theatre show for SEND provision schools – a fast and funny tale about a giant iguanodon, telling the story of fossil discoveries in Southern England – and museum-based workshops which are accessible to all.

Green action

We are continuing our commitment to green action through our investment of £35,000 in *Talking Nature* grants (see page 14), building on our impactful 2023 collaboration with Museum Development England and Art Fund's *The Wild Escape* national project. We are delighted with the success of this programme which runs across 2025-26 and is developing high quality engagement with children and young people and supporting them to have agency over their local natural environment.

As part of Museum Development England we continue to work in partnership with, and invest in, Carbon Literacy for Museums training and the Seeds for Action support network developed and coordinated by Museum Development North, ensuring access

to training and networking for museums in the South West.

In 2024, the American Museum & Gardens in Bath took part in Carbon Literacy for Museums training with encouragement from their local Museum Development Officer. Following the training, the museum Head of Estates set up an internal Climate Justice & Responsibility taskforce which has received a great response from staff and volunteers. A day of nature was programmed to raise awareness and supplement ongoing environmental efforts. Using his experience from the Train the Trainer programme, the Head of Estates has held training sessions to provide Carbon Literacy training for local partners and wider staff.





SHANK 3022
35, 066

Grants

On Display!

Investing £18,250 in our *On Display!* grant scheme not only facilitated the conservation and display of objects and small collections but also fostered audience engagement through interpretive materials and activities.

One of seven *On Display!* grant awardees, South Somerset Heritage Collection (SSHHC) sought to use their grant to conserve a dress in the collection, prevent further deterioration and provide their volunteer team with the necessary knowledge and skills to care for other costume items in their large collection. The dress itself was a purple silk and brocade wedding dress from 1883, which belonged to a Miss Emily Read.

Our grant funding enabled a specialist textile conservator to lead a hands-on workshop, teaching staff and volunteers how to prepare a pro-form mannequin for display. They gained valuable skills in creating supportive layers, crafting a ribbed petticoat and even stitching silk sleeves.

On Display! not only brought Emily's dress back to life but also empowered the volunteers with new skills. Following the costume mounting workshop, volunteers said that they can now plan ahead for future activities, both in and external to the museum.

"Our costume mounting workshop was amazing! The simple joy lay in seeing Emily's dress return in conserved condition and then working together as a team to display it to the best possible standards."

South Somerset Heritage Collection

Capacity Builder

Capacity Builder grants were a brand-new addition to our grant offer in 2024. This grant funding enabled vital investment in the museum sector workforce for individuals, teams or groups of museums to access training, continuing professional development activities and, importantly, network with museums to share best practice and celebrate successes.

The Museum of Gloucester looks after over 4,000 human remains. However, staff were concerned about the skills gap in their care. With their *Capacity Builder* grant they commissioned Osteologist and Archaeological Scientist, Dr Sophie Beckett, to deliver a bespoke training course on the identification, handling and ethical care of human remains. Two of the skeletal remains from the museum's collection were used as case studies, meaning that several errors in labelling and packing were immediately resolved.

By partnering with The Wilson, and offering spaces to other museums in the county, the training had a regional impact, providing an opportunity to create new and strengthen existing working relationships.

Increased knowledge and confidence have led to a renewed commitment to improving the care of the human remains. Learning about the latest innovations and ongoing research in this field has been shared with senior leaders and will inform future business plans, strategies and priorities. New detailed procedures, based in best practice, will be widely shared and will feed into a review of the Gloucestershire Archaeological Archives Standards.

This training was essential in supporting The Museum of Gloucester's National Lottery Heritage Fund-funded project *From Store to Store: Uncovering Gloucester's Archaeological Treasures*, where they will be opening a city centre-based Discovery Centre to review and rationalise archaeology collections.

Talking Nature

In addition to *Capacity Builder*, we launched *Talking Nature*, leading on from the successful 2023 Museum Development England and Art Fund collaboration, *The Wild Escape* project. The funded projects align with the academic year, ensuring that museums can programme effectively with schools.

Showcasing their New Forest Embroidery and other collections, the New Forest Heritage Centre will use their *Talking Nature* grant to highlight how to protect and preserve the unique landscape of the New Forest National Park. For their project they will work with a local flexischool group and a home educators group to create workshops 'by children and for children', as well as co-producing a tactile 'fuzzy felt' style activity with a textile artist. The New Forest Heritage Centre is also one of four museums participating in the Museum Development South West and Kids in Museums *Family Friendly Museums* programme, providing the perfect opportunity to enable them to further develop their new family programme.

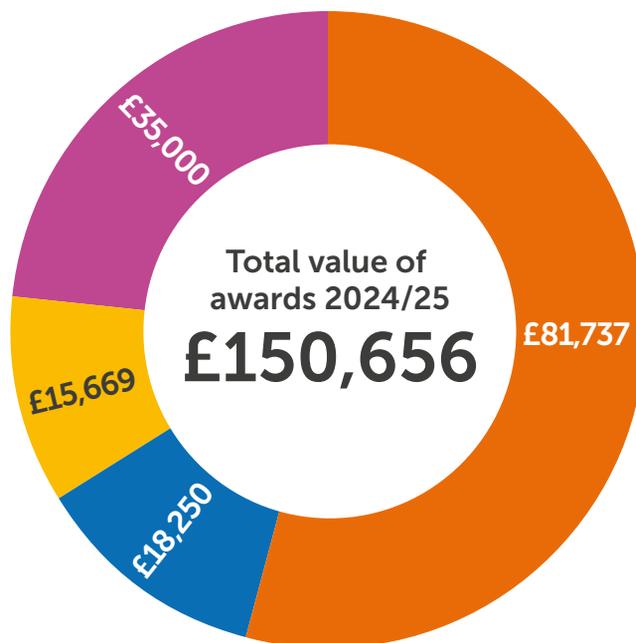
Small grants for change and improvement

For many museums a small grant can be the start of something big – and our *Small Open Grants* are designed with exactly this in mind. We awarded 16 *Small Open Grants* in 2024, funding a wide range of different projects including Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project: Test Space.

After a long renovation and with four large modern galleries now available, The Wilson needed to test ideas for their new museum, Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project, and they decided to do this through a temporary interactive exhibition.

Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project: Test Space is designed to facilitate consultation with the museum's communities. This exhibition aims to understand how communities connect with their collections, and what local people want from the museum's permanent galleries. This temporary exhibition has laid the groundwork for the new museum's success, by cultivating an invested audience base through thoughtful curation and meaningful engagement.

Internally, the project has created positive change within the organisation, impacting staff and volunteers. There have been multiple opportunities for professional development and skill enhancement, empowering team members to refine their abilities in community outreach, curation, and audience engagement.



Key

- Small Open Grants
- On Display!
- Capacity Builder
- Talking Nature



$9 + 3 = 3$
 $3 \times 3 = 9$
 $\frac{9}{3} = 3$
 $9 = 90$
 $9 = 90$
 $10 = 9$
 5

Workshop at Salcombe Primary School Photo: Salcombe Maritime Museum

Programmes

Family Friendly Museums

The Helicopter Museum, Jet Age Museum, New Forest Heritage Centre and Fordingbridge Museum were selected to engage in the Kids in Museums *Family Friendly Museums* programme. This programme was tailored to support museums without a dedicated learning team or member of staff to become more family orientated organisations.

Through the programme participants were able to access mentoring, online training, resources, signposting and one-to-one support from experts in family engagement. By working together as a cohort, the museums shared learnings and provided each other with peer support over the course of the nine-month programme.

Through the programme, the cohort museums learnt the motivations and barriers for family audiences to help them attract more non-visiting families. With support, they developed family orientated interpretation including labels, trails and other resources. As part of the programme, Kids in Museums promoted the cohort museums' offer to a wider family audience.

Organisational Health Check

Museum Development England's *Organisational Health Check* (OHC) is a self-assessment tool which is designed to measure a museum's priorities across key organisational characteristics, from governance to financial planning. The museum receives a report which identifies key development priorities against these measures. Museums use this report for benchmarking, forward planning, workforce development and to inform grant applications.

Six museums worked closely with their local MDO to take part in the facilitated OHC this year: Athelstan Museum, Combe Martin Museum, Elliott's Store and Museum, Thornbury Museum, The Young Gallery, and Totnes Museum. After their OHC, The Young Gallery successfully applied for a *Small Open Grant* to fund and conduct a visioning exercise, with the aim of reviewing its charitable objectives and future organisational development, as recommended in their OHC report.

"The process was extremely useful in allowing us to take a step back to review what we do well and what could be improved."

The Young Gallery



Banish the Backlog

The *Banish the Backlog* programme from Collections Trust offered targeted support and guidance to a cohort of five museums, comprising The American Museum & Gardens Bath, Fashion Museum Bath, Museum of Gloucester, The Leach Pottery, and Totnes Museum.

The programme focused on resolving collection documentation backlogs by implementing Spectrum 5.1 procedures. Alongside creating a SMART documentation plan, the museums cohort explored Inventory and Documentation Planning and reviewed Spectrum procedures relevant to them, such as Cataloguing and Audit.

Each museum was invited to two one-to-one sessions with Collections Trust staff to report on progress and receive tailored support and advice. In addition, they took part in three cohort meetings to look at the steps and considerations involved and to recognise the barriers and issues that many museums may face.

Volunteering Fit for the Future

11
participating
museums

Following its launch and development over the last two years, we responded to interest in the sector by bringing back the *Volunteering Fit for the Future* programme.

This aims to develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound) action plans to improve the volunteering offer of non-National Portfolio Organisation museums.

After outlining their current position through questionnaires, participating museums received a one-to-one meeting with our Sustainable Volunteering Officer, reviewing their priorities for developing volunteering. The museums received targeted advice and signposting to support them, alongside online drop-in 'surgery' sessions with other cohort museums, each on a different theme. With support, the museums built action plans to achieve their agreed priorities. Three participating museums applied for a small grant to help them reach their goals in spring 2025.

"Thank you for all your help and guidance [...] I have definitely learnt a lot and enjoyed the process of doing so – and look forward to applying my new knowledge to the work required."

Lostwithiel Museum

Projects

Growing Together: Museum journeys towards inclusion and collaboration

Growing Together: Embedding Inclusion and Collaboration in our Museums is a pioneering initiative aimed at enhancing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) awareness and practices within museums across the South West Area. The *Growing Together* project is made possible through a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and supported by our Museum Development funding from Arts Council England. The project launched in October 2024 and will run until March 2026.

Building upon the successes of our previous *Travelling Together* project, *Growing Together* will expand our existing cohort of seven museums and five EDI Peer Champions to include a further 13 museums across six museum services and five Champions committed to progressing inclusivity.

A skilled and experienced steering group, bringing diverse perspectives and expertise, supports the project, ensuring it meets its objectives effectively. *Growing Together* also sees museums and Champions involved in *Travelling Together* supported to go further in their EDI development journeys, enabled by our Cultural Producer.

The primary goal of *Growing Together* is to deepen understanding and sustainable implementation of EDI in museums in the South West by:

- Providing expert EDI training: participants engage in comprehensive training sessions designed to deepen their knowledge and confidence in addressing EDI challenges.
- Fostering peer-to-peer learning: the programme enables authentic peer relationships, encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences in networks led by Champions.
- Developing Equity Action Plans: museums utilise insights from training to create or refine actionable plans that promote equity within their institutions.

The new cohort of museums and our new Champions have taken part in a programme of foundational EDI training led by Inclusive Recruiting, who previously designed and delivered the training for *Travelling Together*.

This in-depth training has supported museums' confidence and readiness to develop or review Equity Action Plans. Directing £50,000 of the Heritage Fund's grant investment in small grants, cohort museums will develop proposals for grant-funded activity to progress aspects of these plans. This grant making process utilises MDSW's existing small grant infrastructure and is supported by the expert input and insights of *Growing Together's* Steering Group.

This project has already also seen Champions developing peer networking sessions based on their insights from training, individual interests and expertise. Peer networks looking at language, trans inclusion, accessibility and sensory access began rolling out across the South West Area in March 2025. Peer networking opportunities will continue into the project's second year in 2025–26.

Contrast Effect

- Comparing offers to the collection with each other rather than assessing them against Collections Development Policy
- Comparing two schools - Private v state. (Schwartz et al.)
 - Volunteer recruitment - Ingham to 'stakeholder' (MEE)
- 'idea in our heads that a volunteer should look/be a certain way/age etc. compared with a 'younger' vol.
- 'they would have done it like this' contrasting 2 people & not seeing the whole (= people do things differently, blinded to seeing other things).

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Highlights

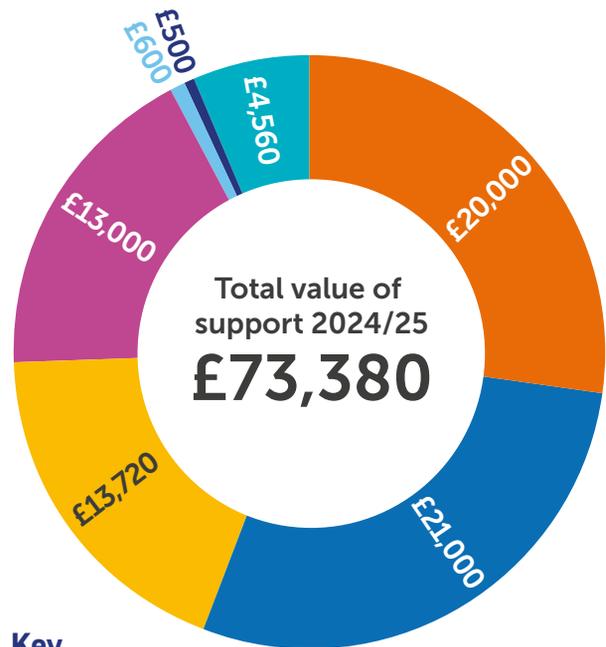
Accredited Museums	33
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	1
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	9
MDSW Priority Museums	20
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	35

Museums in Cornwall have always worked together with a strong sense of community, whilst cherishing what is unique about each one of them. This year has been a chance to take stock and focus on what that community needs to flourish in the future. All museums were invited to a workshop day, to take valuable time to draft a collective vision, mission and strategy. With collaboration running through every element, the next step is to re-imagine a Cornwall-wide museums group to finalise and deliver this strategy.

MDSW worked closely with the Culture Team at Cornwall Council to support the Cornwall Museum Development Officer (MDO)'s employment transfer at the start of the year. We are keen to support further collaboration with the Archives and Cornish Studies Service, the Cornish Language Office, the Strategic Historic Environment Service and the Cornish Mining World Heritage Site, ensuring museums remain at the heart of the cultural landscape.

The Cornwall MDO and Sustainable Volunteering Officer supported St Ives Museum through the *Organisational Health Check and Volunteering Fit for the Future* programmes in 2023. This enabled the museum to undertake organisational prioritisation for 2024, leading to a successful *Small Open Grants* application to support their audience development. This grant enabled St Ives Museum to conduct a visitor

feedback project supported by an external consultant. Nearly 300 responses were received, providing valuable data about visitor engagement, demographics, interests, impressions of the museum and suggestions for improvement. The results are being used to review aspects of the museum such as signage, accessibility, display materials, volunteer resources, and marketing and social media management as part of a new visitor engagement strategy. St Ives Museum is a volunteer-led museum, Working Towards Accreditation, and this solid grounding in the ongoing gathering of audience data to inform action and priorities will support its long-term sustainability.



Key

- MDO provision
- Local Authority investment
- Specialist Development services
- Awarded in grants
- Technical Accreditation
- Project
- Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Highlights

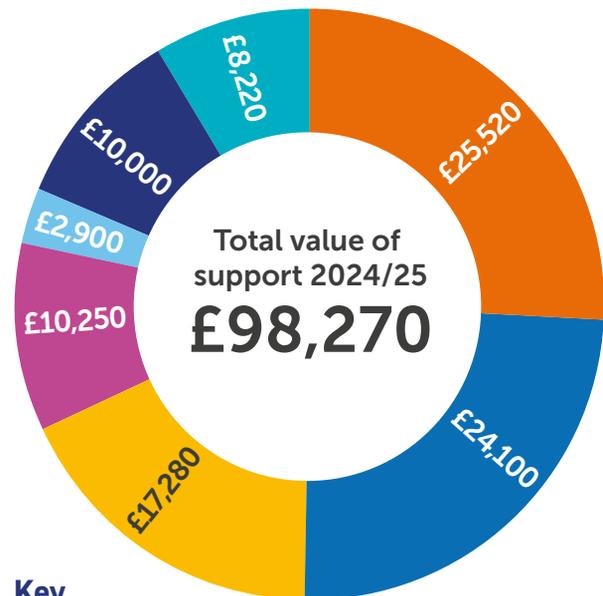
Accredited Museums	48
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	1
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	4
MDSW Priority Museums	35
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	56

During 2024–25, museums across Devon worked hard to build their organisational resilience by finding ways to appeal to volunteers, investigating options for income generation, embracing learning opportunities and applying for funding. They were generous in sharing ideas and experiences to build expertise during networking opportunities facilitated by our Devon Museum Development Officer (MDO). Staff and volunteer wellbeing was highlighted as an area of need in the previous year, so strengthening peer support opportunities across Devon was a focus for our local, place-based MDO.

It was a busy year for Accreditation, with Bishopsteignton Heritage Trust, Exeter City Football Club Museum and the Museum of Policing in Devon and Cornwall starting applications and Tavistock Museum submitting a successful return. Topsham Museum and Brixham Heritage Museum ran successful *Small Open Grant* projects and Salcombe Maritime Museum obtained an *On Display!* grant. These funding successes have really built confidence, with several museums now looking to submit applications for larger projects in 2025-2026.

2024 was a very challenging year for Combe Martin Museum, with increasing costs and decreasing volunteer numbers. However, they rose to the challenge admirably, taking up opportunities where they could become

more resilient to external pressures. At the beginning of the year, they took part in our *Volunteering Fit for the Future* programme and received support from our Sustainable Volunteering Officer and MDO to move to a solely volunteer-run museum model, with volunteers taking on lead roles. With encouragement from our MDO they then applied for the Association of Independent Museums (AIM)'s Higher Consultancy Support, which gave them some clear actions aimed to increase income generation. Following on from the AIM report, they then took part in our *Organisational Health Check* to assess where further areas of development might be and to think about next steps.



Key

- MDO provision
- Local Authority investment
- Specialist Development services
- Awarded in grants
- Technical Accreditation
- Project
- Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Highlights

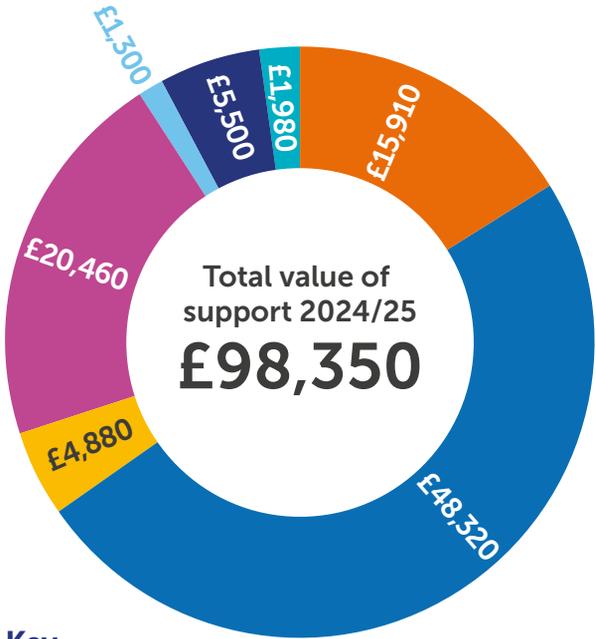
Accredited Museums	30
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	3
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	2
MDSW Priority Museums	29
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	33

Dorset’s museums have delivered some great engagement projects over the year. These include Blandford Museum’s National Heritage Lottery Fund-funded *Reaching Out with Sound* initiative, which introduced an innovative digital audio description approach to enhance the visitor experience for vision impaired and blind visitors. There was also Shaftesbury Abbey Museum’s Arts Council England (ACE) and Museum Development South West (MDSW)-funded conservation, display and education work on a rare 15th century St Gregory Mass statue.

Positive partnership working has been a leitmotif, with Russell Cotes Art Gallery working alongside MDSW across Purbeck’s community museums, to conserve, interpret and showcase fine art in a spectacular six-month exhibition.

Many museums have sought to strengthen their sustainability through focused resilience projects. Targeted capital grants from Dorset Council have supported the leverage of vitally needed ACE Museum Estate and Development (MEND) investment at Dorset Museum and Nothe Fort. Our Dorset Museum Development Officer (MDO) has been actively supporting development and business planning at Blandford Fashion Museum, Lyme Regis and Portland Museum to strengthen visitor footfall and income generation.

During the autumn of 2024, our local, place-based MDO worked collaboratively with Visit Dorset and 12 independent museums to develop and deliver a digital marketing campaign centred on inspiring local residents and visitors to explore the county’s museums during October half term. This initiative was supported through a *Shared Prosperity* grant which facilitated new website content and Facebook and Instagram paid advertising. Almost 1,000 additional visits were generated and the project has catalysed further museum and tourism collaboration for 2025, focused on the Festival of Archaeology.



- Key**
- MDO provision
 - Local Authority investment
 - Specialist Development services
 - Awarded in grants
 - Technical Accreditation
 - Project
 - Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

Gloucestershire Highlights

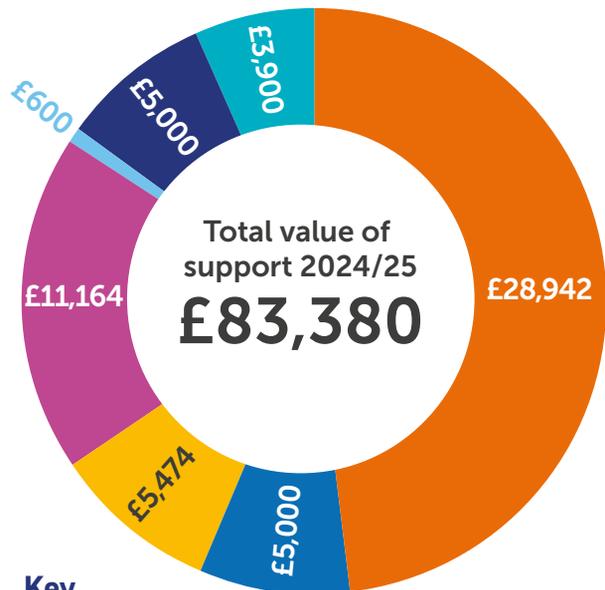
Accredited Museums	23
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	1
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	1
MDSW Priority Museums	20
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	23

This has been a positive year for Gloucestershire’s museums, and a feeling of ambition is prevailing across the county. A number of museums are hoping to undertake major projects in the future and our Gloucestershire Museum Development Officer (MDO) has been supporting them in preparing for this through planning, expert advice and applying for grants to support their ambitions. The importance of a stable, well-functioning organisation and governance structure with good volunteer and staff engagement has been key to these conversations. Jet Age Museum participated in the Kids in Museums programme, working to strengthen their family and education offers. The Museum of Gloucester took part in the *Banish the Backlog* programme to support their collections team’s workload. Museums including Winchcombe, Dr Jenner’s House and Jet Age have welcomed new trustees and chairs this year, which has brought a renewed sense of energy and dynamism to many areas. However, struggles with capacity are still very real for many, with volunteer recruitment and retention remaining high on museums’ lists of needs.

The Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum has been working on their governance and strengthening their organisation from the inside out as they consider their future and what they would like to achieve. They benefitted from detailed advice from our

local, place-based MDO and a presentation to their Board of Trustees, building on areas of development identified in their previous *Organisational Health Check*. This led to securing the support of an Association of Independent Museums (AIM) governance expert to help them plan and deliver change.

Dean Forest Railway Museum is working hard to shore up and use more of their buildings to expand their offer. They worked closely with our MDO to identify the steps they would need to take to secure support for their plans and the expertise they required. Through recommendations from our MDO they appointed a well-qualified consultant to begin to guide them through the development and funding process.



Key

- MDO provision
- Local Authority investment
- Specialist Development services
- Awarded in grants
- Technical Accreditation
- Project
- Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight Highlights

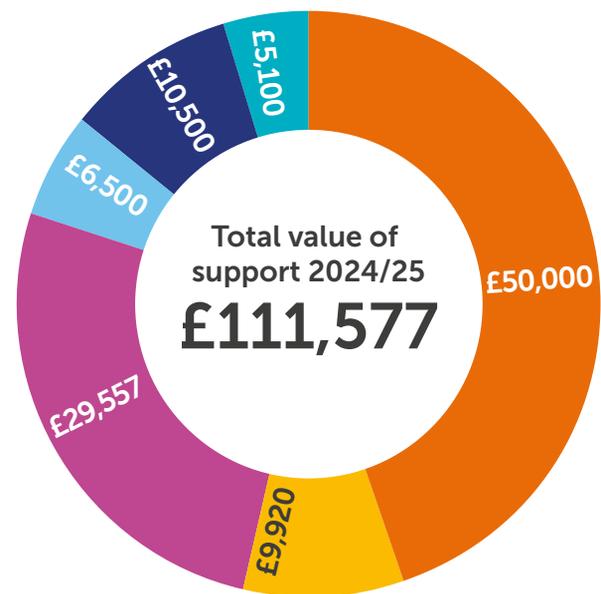
Accredited Museums	71
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	4
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	21
MDSW Priority Museums	49
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	57

It has been a positive year for museums in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight as they moved from Museum Development South East to Museum Development South West (MDSW). Our local, place-based Museum Development Officers (MDOs) have focused heavily on developing strong peer support networks to encourage museums to feel secure and confident in the support they could access despite the changes taking place.

We're delighted that many museums have been successful in applying for MDSW grants including *On Display!*, *Small Open Grants*, *Capacity Builder* and *Talking Nature*. It has been fantastic to see the museums engaging with the training and programmes offered, such as *Volunteering Fit for the Future* with Fordingbridge Museum and Winchester Cathedral taking part. *Growing Together* has seen museums from both Southampton and Portsmouth Councils benefitting from this deep dive project discovery of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

Thanks to a *Capacity Builder* grant, in February 2025 the Museum Development Advisory Panel hosted the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Forum at The Arc in Winchester. The network, which represents 12 museums across the sub-region, designed, planned and delivered a programme of focused and practical learning

for museums in the area as well as further afield. This conference saw more than 70 museum professionals representing over 40 museums come together. Included in the day was a presentation on environmental sustainability measures from SS Great Britain, sector updates from Bloomberg Connect, Digital Culture Network and more, news from the sub-region, networking and even a collections pub quiz led by our Conservation Development Officer! The day gave colleagues and friends a chance to take time out from their daily jobs to catch up and be inspired.



Key

- MDO provision
- Specialist Development services
- Awarded in grants
- Technical Accreditation
- Project
- Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

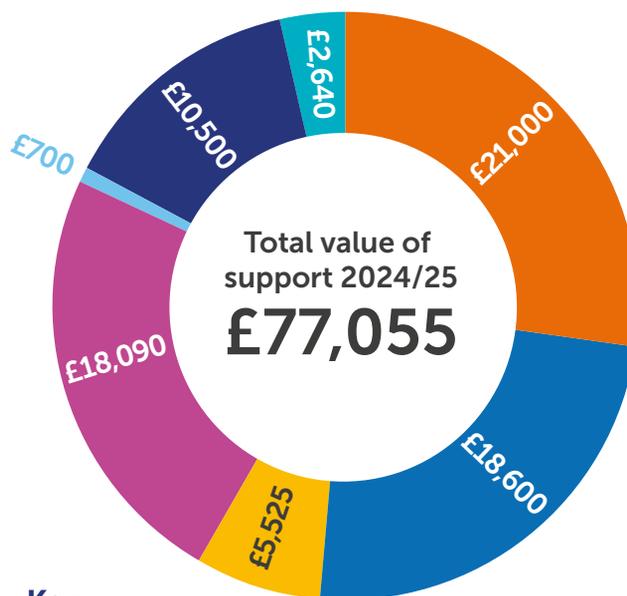
Somerset Highlights

Accredited Museums	23
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	4
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	4
MDSW Priority Museums	22
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	24

Museums across Somerset have been working hard this year to apply for funding, enhance organisational resilience and audience experiences, and improve collections management. Staff and volunteers across the area have also taken up opportunities to support their own development. The Helicopter Museum participated in Kids in Museum's *Family Friendly Museums* programme, joining museums from across the region to develop their family offer with mentoring and training support. Glastonbury Abbey used a *Capacity Builder* grant to support their front of house team to review their visitor welcome, in preparation for reopening the site after a significant redesign of the visitor entrance (to open in 2025, funded through Glastonbury's Town Fund). Weston Museum's learning officer was able to attend the Group for Education in Museums' conference in Bristol to support her continuing professional development, thanks to a *Capacity Builder* grant, and this led to a successful application for a *Talking Nature* grant which she is using to develop a partnership project with a local school.

Following Frome Museum's participation in the *Organisational Health Check* programme in 2023, a priority was to build a clear picture of who was, and who wasn't using their museum, and why. Our Somerset Museum Development Officer (MDO) supported them to design a project to address these aims, and

to secure a *Small Open Grant* to deliver it. Our local, place-based MDO assisted them to engage an audience development specialist with the funding, to help the team better understand their core audiences, identify and engage new target audiences within their community. The grant also enabled them to commission a professional Access Audit, which has informed their audience development planning.



Key

- MDO provision
- Local Authority investment
- Specialist Development services
- Awarded in grants
- Technical Accreditation
- Project
- Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

West of England Highlights

Accredited Museums	30
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	0
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	6
MDSW Priority Museums	23
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	35

The networks and relationship building work of our West of England Museum Development Officer (MDO) paid dividends this year. Our local, place-based MDO matched museums with museum mentors to provide support for colleagues across the Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire, West of England (WoE) area. Alongside this, museums accessed the specialist expertise of Museum Development South West (MDSW) through one-to-one support and site visits.

The WoE area was one of the highest recipients of MDSW grants this year, having achieved success with National Lottery Heritage Fund grants, with both the Museum of Bath at Work and Glenside Hospital Museum receiving grants, and other museums submitting grant applications with the support of our MDO.

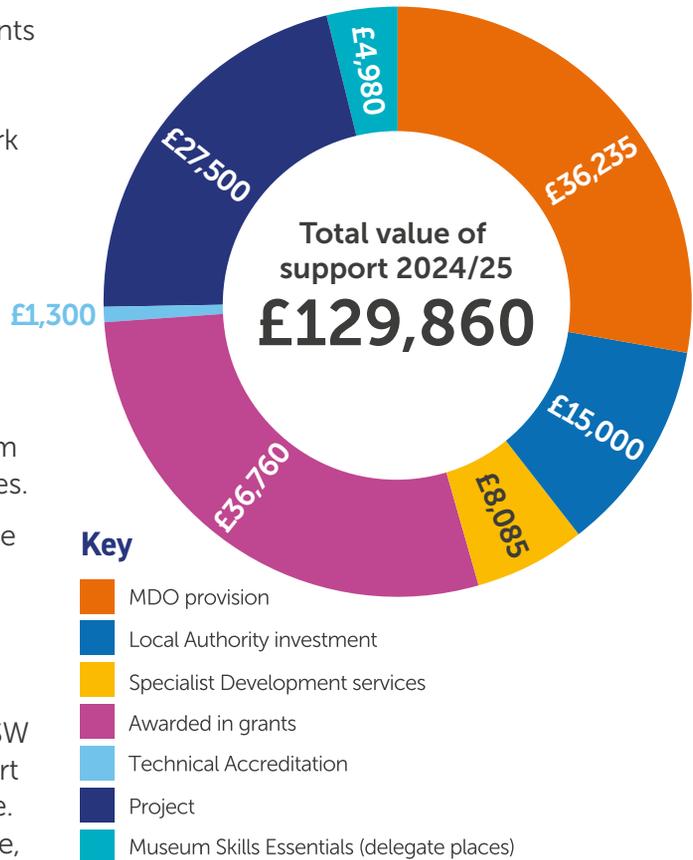
Thornbury and District Museum undertook an *Organisational Health Check* (OHC) with support from their MDO. This has helped the museum focus on priorities for the next 12 months and beyond, ensuring their long-term resilience as they navigate different challenges.

After several years The Museum of Bath Stone successfully achieved Working Towards Accreditation status and several museums successfully maintained Accreditation status this year.

Progress from an *On Display!* grant from MDSW in 2024 has seen No.1 Royal Crescent kick start a new way of programming the historic house. Our grant funding was used to clean, conserve,

and display four rare portraits of a local family painted by Thomas Gainsborough. The paintings hung alongside 21st century works as part of a pilot exhibition within a newly launched gallery space. The positive visitor and exhibiting artists' feedback received by the museum influenced the next exhibition in the gallery, to bring more contemporary work into the historic house. As part of our grant a full condition and treatment report on the Gainsborough paintings was carried out, which has supported the museum in obtaining further investment for their next stage of conservation.

As a volunteer-led museum, it is particularly helpful to have the backing of the Museum Development team, as we try to negotiate a constantly changing situation.
Thornbury and District Museum



Wiltshire and Swindon Highlights

Accredited Museums	26
Museums formally Working Towards Accreditation (WTA)	3
Museums in receipt of NPO or DCMS funding	5
MDSW Priority Museums	18
Total number of museum and heritage organisations engaged	27

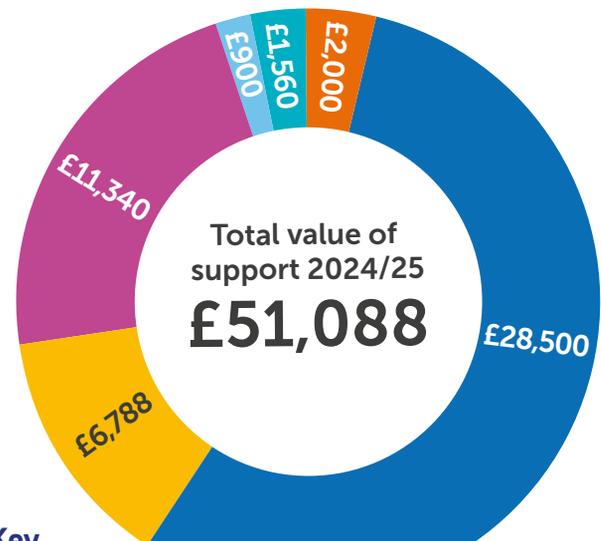
We have continued to work closely with Wiltshire Council’s Conservation and Museums Advisory Service. This year has been a time of growth and success for museums in the county, with many focusing on Accreditation requirements and returns. Arundells in Salisbury became Accredited for the first time this year and Amesbury History Centre was confirmed as Working Towards Accreditation. Our Wiltshire Museum Development Officer (MDO) has also continued working in a mentor capacity with volunteer-run Purton Museum to review their policies and plans in anticipation of an Accreditation review.

Volunteer management and recruitment has been on the agenda for museums in Wiltshire. Following their involvement with *Volunteering Fit for the Future* last year, Trowbridge Museum devised a successful training programme for their front-of-house volunteer team. This covered several topics relating to the museum and their visitors’ experience. Attendees were also asked to complete a survey about being a museum volunteer.

The results identified a desire to understand more about woollen cloth production, one of the museum’s key themes. A successful *Capacity Builder Grant* application, supported by our local place-based MDO, saw the volunteers visiting Stroudwater Textile Trust to develop both their knowledge and their confidence when speaking to visitors. Trowbridge Museum shared a case

study about the training at a volunteering forum organised by our MDO, which showcased good practice in the county. Wiltshire Museum and REME Museum also presented examples of volunteer management and digital volunteering.

Swindon Museum & Art Gallery reopened in a new home within the city’s civic offices, with new branding after a four-year closure. The museum hosted a packed Wiltshire & Swindon museums group meeting in late 2024, showcasing the museum to peers and sharing their story in “creating Museum & Art Swindon”. The Railway Village Museum in Swindon was an active participant in our *Volunteering fit for the Future* programme, sharing best practice in involving younger people with heritage. They have contributed to a case study which they hope will encourage other heritage organisations to consider hosting T-Level placements.



Key

- MDO provision
- Local Authority investment
- Specialist Development services
- Awarded in grants
- Technical Accreditation
- Museum Skills Essentials (delegate places)

Financial overview 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

Income	£
Arts Council England Museum Grant*	648,412
Local Authorities	47,100
Museum Development England - Annual Museum Survey	38,755
Other contract income	8,679
Other grant income – National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), Art Fund**	202,580
Total Income	945,526

Notes: *Including £39,260 brought forward from 2023/24

**Including NLHF Travelling Together and Growing Together

Expenditure	£
Invested in our local Museum Development Officer Network	47,100
MDSW investment in Museum Development Officer network	199,607
Specialist Services in Conservation and Collection Care	59,985
Specialist Services in Volunteer Development	45,445
Workforce, Skills and MDE Carbon Literacy training programme	40,472
Technical Accreditation contracts	11,663
MDSW Small Grant Programme	136,408
Governance and Programme Management	85,062
Area and National Programme Coordination, Communications and Operations	116,727
Contract expenditure (Annual Museum Survey and other contract income)	38,775
Other grants – National Lottery Heritage Fund project expenditure	81,462
Other grants – Art Fund Museum Development England Workforce project	12,500
Total	875,206
<i>Funds carried forward to the next financial year ACE and NLHF</i>	<i>70,320</i>

Partners and supporters

We are grateful to the following for their financial and other contributions to the programme in 2024/25:

Arts Council England
Art Fund
Bristol City Council – Bristol Culture and Creative Industries
Hampshire Cultural Trust
Historic England
National Lottery Heritage Fund
South West Heritage Trust

Thanks to the following partners and collaborators, who we commissioned or worked in partnership with to deliver the MDSW Skills programme:

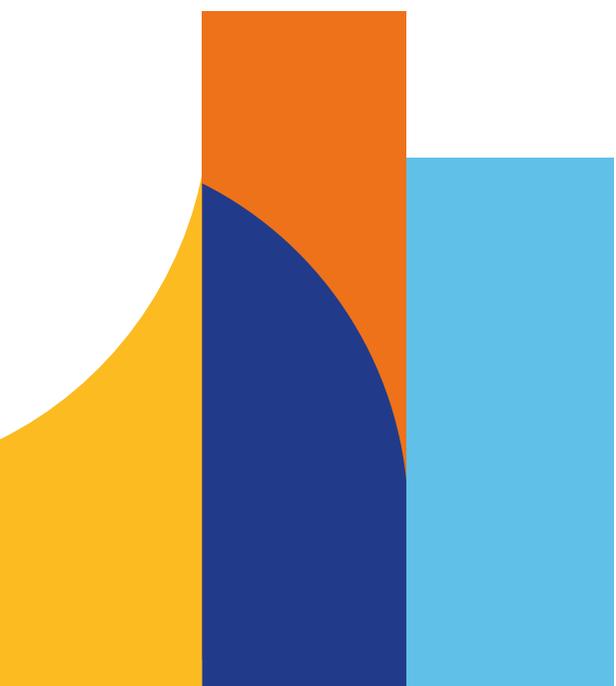
Arts Council England
Arts Work
Cause4
Christina Lister
Collections Trust
Culture Force
Inclusive Recruiting
Kids in Museums
Welcome to Excellence

We also extend our gratitude to the following organisations and consultants who have brought their experience, expertise and generosity to the *Growing Together* project:

Amanda Hart
Amy Frost
Autism in Museums Network
Bright Culture
Chloe Phillips
Claire Antrobus
Claire Madge
Inclusive Recruiting
Léa Guzzo
Louisa Adjoa-Parker
Marie Brewer
Sam Munday-Webb
Sue Davies
Queer Kernow

We would like to thank the following local authorities, which support Museum Development provision at a local level, either directly or through a financial contribution to the programme:

Bath & North East Somerset Council
Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council
Bristol City Council
Budleigh Salterton Town Council
Cornwall Council
Dorset Council
East Devon District Council
Exeter City Council
Gloucester City Council
North Devon Council
Plymouth City Council
Somerset Council
South Gloucestershire Council
South Hams District Council
Sidmouth Town Council
Stroud District Council
Torrige District Council
West Devon Borough Council
Wiltshire Council



Our team in 2024/25

Museum Development Officers

Alex Gibson and **Julie Taylor-Kent**
Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol,
South Gloucestershire and Swindon

Stephanie Clemens Cornwall

Joanna Cairns Devon

Vicky de Wit Dorset, Bournemouth,
Christchurch and Poole

Jenni Orme and **Julie Taylor-Kent**
Gloucestershire

Alice LePage and **Sheila Pott**
Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and
the Isle of Wight

Rachel Bellamy Somerset

Heather Perry Wiltshire

Specialist Officers

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Conservation Development Officer

Eleanor Moore

Sustainable Volunteering Officer

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Programme Officer

Roz Bonnet Programme and Projects Officer

Fay Whitfield Cultural Engagement Officer

Pat Janus Data and Research Assistant

Caroline Lyall, James Fletcher and
Iain Richardson Business Support Officers

Tim Burge and **Philip Claris**
Technical Accreditation Officers

Clare Ferdinando Cultural Producer

Board Members

Stephen Boyce Chair

Tim Bryan

Sarah Cheers

Phil Collins

Jess Hoare

Crystal Johnson

Helen Rana

Hannah Stone

Issie Tovey

Corina Westwood



We are extremely grateful to all those who work in and run the museums and heritage organisations who engaged in the programme in 2024/25. We would also like to pay tribute to all the volunteers who contribute their skills, time and passion which underpin our sector.

Aerospace Bristol, Aldbourne Heritage Centre, Alfred Gillett Trust, American Museum & Gardens, Arnos Vale Cemetery, Arundells, Ashburton Museum, Athelstan Museum, Axminster Heritage Centre, B&NES Council Heritage Service, Bampton Heritage and Visitor Centre, Bath Abbey, Bath Postal Museum, Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Beckford's Tower and Museum, Bicton Park Countryside Museum, Bishopsteignton Heritage, Blake Museum, Blandford Fashion Museum, Blandford Town Museum, Bodmin Keep, Bodmin Town Museum, Bournemouth Natural Science Society, Bridport Museum, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Britannia Royal Naval College Museum and Archives, Brixham Heritage Museum, Bruton Museum, Burton at Bideford, Chard Museum, Chippenham Museum, Clifton Suspension Bridge Visitor Centre, Coldharbour Mill, Combe Martin Museum, Corfe Castle Town Trust Museum, Court Barn, Crediton Area History & Museum Society, Crofton Beam Engines, Dartmoor Prison Museum, Dartmouth Museum, Dawlish Museum, Dean Forest Railway Museum, Dean Heritage Centre, Dingles Fairground Museum, Dorset History Centre, Dorset Museum, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, Dr Jenner's House, Exeter Cathedral, Exeter City FC Museum, Fairfield House, Fairlynch Museum, Fashion Museum Bath, Fleet Air Arm Museum, Folk of Gloucester, Frenchay Village Museum, Frome Heritage Museum, Gauge Museum, Geevor Tin Mine, Gerrans Parish Heritage Centre, Glastonbury Abbey, Glastonbury Antiquarian Society, Glenside Hospital Museum, Gold Hill Museum, Grampound with Creed Heritage Centre, Great Torrington Heritage Museum, Green Hill Arts, Harvey's Foundry Trust (Hayle Heritage Centre), Haynes Motor Museum, Heritage & Youth Centre, Herschel Museum of Astronomy, Hestercombe House and Gardens, Holburne Museum, Holst Victorian House, Ilfracombe Museum, Isles of Scilly Museum, Jet Age Museum, John Moore Museum, John Wesley's New Room, Keep Military Museum, King Johns Hunting Lodge Museum, Kingsbridge Cookworthy Museum, Lawrence House Museum, Liskeard and District Museum, Lostwithiel Museum, Lydiard House Museum, Lyme Regis Museum, Lyn and Exmoor Museum, Mere Museum, Museum In The Park, Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, Museum of Bath At Work, Museum of Bath Stone, Museum of Cornish Life, Museum of Dartmoor Life, Museum of Design in Plastics, Museum of East Asian Art, Museum of East Dorset, Museum of Global Communications, Museum of Gloucester, Museum of Policing Devon and Cornwall, Museum of Somerset, Museum of the Mercian Regiment, National Maritime Museum Cornwall, National Museum of the Royal Navy, National Trust, National Trust – Dyrham Park, National Trust – Mompesson House, National Trust – Snowhill Manor, Newton Abbot Museum, No.1 Royal Crescent, Nothe Fort, Old Guildhall Museum and Gaol, Ottery St Mary Heritage Museum, Penlee House Gallery and Museum, Penryn Museum, Perranzabuloe Museum, Poole Museum, Poole Old Lifeboat Museum (RNLI), Powderham Castle, Purbeck Stone Museum (Langton Matravers), REME Museum, Richard Jefferies Museum, River & Rowing Museum, Roman Baths Museum, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Royal Artillery Museum, Royal Cornwall Museum, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, RWA (Royal West of England Academy), Salcombe Maritime Museum, Salisbury Museum, Seaton Museum, Shaftesbury Abbey Museum & Gardens, Sherborne Museum, Sidmouth Museum, Somerset Coalfield Life at Radstock Museum, Somerset Military Museum, Somerset Rural Life Museum, South Somerset Heritage Collection, SS Great Britain, St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery, St Hilary Heritage Centre, St Ives Museum, St Mary Redcliffe, STEAM: Museum of the Great Western Railway, Stroudwater Textile Trust, Stuart House Heritage, Sturminster Newton Museum, Swanage Museum & Heritage Centre, Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, Tamar Bridge Visitor and Learning Centre, Tavistock Museum, Teign Heritage, Tetbury Police Museum & Courtroom, Tewkesbury Museum, The Bishop's Palace, The Box, The Castle Heritage Centre Bude, The Cheltenham Trust, The George Muller Charitable Trust, The Leach Pottery, The Newt in Somerset, The Rifles Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment Museum, The Stradling Collection, The Valiant Soldier Museum and Heritage Centre, The Wilson, Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Thornbury and District Museum, Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life, Topsham Museum, Torquay Museum, Torre Abbey, Totnes Fashion & Textile Museum, Trowbridge Museum, University of Bristol Theatre Collection, Victoria Art Gallery, Wareham Town Museum, Watchet Market House Museum, Wells and Mendip Museum, West Somerset Railway, Weston Museum, Westonzoyland Pumping Station Museum, Weymouth Museum, Wheal Martyn Trust, Whimble Heritage Centre, Wiltshire Museum, Winchcombe Museum, Wotton Heritage Centre, WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre, Yate & District Heritage Centre, Young Gallery.

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 Museum Development South West

