



The Museums, Libraries and Archives
Council's response to the independent
Review of Renaissance

JULY 21, 2009

Contents

1. Preface	4
2. Introduction	5
3. Summary	6
4. The MLA response to the Review's recommendations	9
5. Process for implementation	12
6. The MLA and programme delivery	13
7. Conclusion	18

1. Preface

Renaissance in the Regions is a ground-breaking programme which aims to transform England's Museums. Funded by central government it will help regional museums to raise their standards in order to better support local education, community development and economic regeneration.

This is a mammoth task and I welcome this timely Review of the *Renaissance in the Regions*' programme. Sara Selwood and the Review team have worked hard to produce an in-depth analysis, which will be most useful in the evaluation of the current programme and the planning and setting of strategic priorities for the future.

So far, I am glad to say, *Renaissance in the Regions* has been a real success. There are around 15 million visits to the hub museums funded by the programme every year; visitor numbers have increased by 18.5% since 2002/03 and, by the end of March 2011 nearly £300 million will have been invested in it.

These are remarkable achievements and vindicate the decision to put real investment into our regional museums and galleries for the first time. I am pleased that the Museums Libraries and Archives Council has already started to improve the financial control of the programme. I also support their plan to use the Review as a chance to work more closely with Hub partners to re-focus the vision for Renaissance and look at possible changes to delivery mechanisms before the next Government Spending Review.

Much has been achieved but there is still much to be done. I wish Renaissance and the MLA all the very best.

Barbara Follett MP

Minister for Culture, Creative Industries & Tourism

2. Introduction

This document sets out the MLA response to the independent review of the Renaissance programme, established by the MLA, and undertaken in 2008.

The MLA welcomes the Review, which it is publishing in full alongside this response, and is grateful for the work of Sara Selwood and her colleagues on the Review panel.

The publication of the Review now enables the MLA to present and progress its National Action Plan for Museums, *Leading Museums; a vision and strategic action plan for English museums*, which has been partly informed by the Review and its findings.

3. Summary

3.1 Key findings

Renaissance is a success story. The programme is the UK government's most important intervention in English non-national museums since the Museums Act of 1845.

Renaissance has already helped prevent the decline of many regional museums and raised their profile, working closely with local government in particular. The programme has also enabled museums to focus on improving services for local communities. The elevated status of Hub museums means they are now more capable of levering in other funding, and have the capacity to contribute to regional strategies including learning and skills, tourism and regeneration.

Visitor figures in Renaissance museums have increased, school services are vastly improved, and there is increased usage by people from hard to reach groups. Beyond the Hubs, the Museum Development Officer role and funding structure is considered to be achieving 'real change'.

Sustained funding will help complete the comprehensive transformation that the original Task Force visualised. This will ensure museums continue to develop as confident, ambitious institutions, focused on continuous improvement, equipped to articulate the value they create for society.

The Review calls for far-reaching changes to the delivery mechanisms of Renaissance. These include the replacement of the current Hub model with 'core museums' supplemented by Challenge Funding and a national network of Museum Development Officers.

For many in the museums sector some of these proposals will be controversial. While the MLA understands the principles behind these recommendations, it will keep an open mind as to whether they are necessary to achieve the desired ends. In any event, changes will not be rushed into. MLA will work closely with key stakeholders, and if any further changes are thought to be necessary, they would be implemented in time for the next major business planning round in 2011.

Vitality, the Renaissance programme is a regional one, delivering at a local level. The MLA will ensure that any reshaping in the arrangements to deliver it will continue to reflect regional circumstances and accountability, and most importantly, the impact it makes on behalf of people in the regions. For these reasons, MLA is unlikely to support any changes that would risk undermining the strength that comes from the programme being a regional one.

3. Summary

We therefore do not favour the proposal for a national governance board, which would only add a layer of bureaucracy to the MLA Board and regional accountability. The MLA has already strengthened the role of its Board in taking strategic decisions over Renaissance and has transformed the accountability of the programme through changes to its management and governance.

A full consideration of the recommendations is given in Section 3, but in summary the MLA accepts the opportunity the report gives to restate the Renaissance vision. We will work closely with stakeholders and other interested parties in setting out that vision.

We also welcome the recommendations related to the oversight and management of the programme which will be used, alongside MLA's own recent changes, to lead the programme with confidence into the future.

The Review demonstrates that Renaissance has delivered substantial benefits to regional museums and especially to their audiences. Renaissance has led to better facilities – particularly for younger visitors – and has made a notable contribution to public access more generally and to the wider enjoyment of England's regional museums. The funding has helped to leverage additional resources, and has palpably heightened the confidence of the sector, as it was intended to do.

Among the aspects of the Review that MLA strongly welcomes are the following:

- The focus on local authorities and the improvement agenda.
- The call for museums to concentrate on profound changes in their organisational capacity.
- The emphasis on partnership working.
- The suggestions for working with social entrepreneurs, health trusts and the voluntary sector.
- The section on commissioning.
- Challenges to the MLA to deliver more and not to shy away from terminating contracts.

3.2 The National Action Plan for Museums

The National Action Plan for Museums, *Leading Museums; a vision and strategic action plan for English museums*, charts a future based on the museum sector working together to three objectives – Supporting excellence; Promoting partnerships and Building capacity.

3. Summary

It builds on the success of Renaissance in the Regions and plots a future where museums increasingly put people first. Developed with key partners, it provides the strategic framework to direct future Renaissance spending, and for the sector to work together nationally and regionally.

It envisages a future where excellent regional and national museums work together to spread best practice, putting people at the heart of museums, and museums at the heart of communities. At the core of the plan is the idea that museums should be less about keeping collections, and more about sharing collections.

The MLA aims to see national museums work in active partnerships with regional museums, and collections shared not only in how the stories are told, but also in practical ways through mobile exhibitions, loans and effective exploitation of digital technology.

3.3 MLA and Renaissance

The Review examined the programme up to the autumn of 2008, overlapping with MLA's transformation, which included fundamental changes to how MLA manages Renaissance. Deficiencies in the oversight of the programme had been identified by the MLA and addressed by the time the Review was received. During the course of the Review the MLA has been re-modeled and new robust business planning put in place. The Review is valuable in allowing us to check the changes we have made against the recommendations, and make further changes as needed.

In this period, the MLA closed down the independent regional MLA's, and replaced them with a single integrated national and regional team, that is well placed to ensure the programme is accountable regionally in a coherent way that is consistent with national leadership. This has also released Renaissance funds for front-line delivery and a regional improvement fund has been created to drive improvement outside the Hub framework.

MLA will work with partners to re-state the vision for Renaissance, re-establish its shared ownership and plan the future of the programme. Fundamental to this process will be the collection of robust evidence about the impact of Renaissance that new systems have made possible.

4. The MLA response to the Review's recommendations

The review has some 70 recommendations sub divided into four blocks (Guiding Principles, New Frameworks, Governance and Implementation) these often interconnect but from them four main blocks do emerge.

Guiding principles

A small number of recommendations call for the Government to commit long-term to Renaissance (R1), for it to be linked to the national museum strategy, and for its overall vision and clarity of purpose be revisited and restated.

MLA welcomes these recommendations and endorses them. It will work with key stakeholders including DCMS regarding their implementation. Recommendation R1 remains in the gift of Government.

Related recommendations: R1, R2.1, R2.2, R2.3, R2.4, R2.5, R3, R11.1, R11.2

New frameworks

This is the most far reaching of the recommendations. It calls for the break up of the Hub model to be replaced by a three-tier model of funding:

- Core museums that build partnerships.
- Challenge funding to other museums, also in partnerships.
- A national network of Museum Development Officers (MDOs).

These recommendations are primarily driven from a view that Hubs have failed to deliver real partnership, and to a certain extent have become self-interested "clubs". It is envisaged that the new model will "liberate" the sector to deliver real partnerships, as originally hoped but not yet realised.

The recommendations do form a logical model for delivering Renaissance in a flexible, holistic and entrepreneurial way. However, their implementation would involve, in effect, dismantling and rebuilding Renaissance. Therefore these recommendations should not be entered into lightly, and without strong evidence that they would achieve the results envisaged.

4. The MLA response to the Review's recommendations

There are sub elements to these recommendations: working beyond traditional boundaries, etc which have already been embraced in the new planning guidance for 2009-11. The commitment to a national MDO network is noted and broadly welcomed in principle. Separate, parallel work within MLA has identified the importance of this resource, but also that there is a need to provide strategic direction and leadership and a more coherent model of delivery.

MLA will carefully consider this set of recommendations and consult closely with key stakeholders including current Hub museums, DCMS and others. It will also carefully track progress of Hubs under the new business plans developed for 2009-11 and look to pilot the "core museum" idea in one region.

A decision will be made during 2009-10 as to what recommendations should be accepted and work done to put these in place for the beginning of the 2011-14 planning round. It may be that a combination of the changes MLA has already implemented, with this set of recommendations, can be used to address the shortcomings identified in the review. MLA will investigate integrating the MDOs more thoroughly within Renaissance as a national framework, centrally funded and coordinated.

Related recommendations: R4, R4.1-6, R5, R5.1-3, R6, R6.1-3, R7, R7.1-3, R14.1-3, R21, R21.1-4, R22.1, R22.2

Governance

Replacement of the current regional boards with a new, powerful, national board has been suggested. These recommendations to an extent reflect "old Renaissance" and the perception that it did not have the prominence it deserved in MLA thinking, and the perceived failure of the regional board model. Through recent changes at MLA Renaissance is now central to all Executive Board/MLA Board thinking, and the regional boards have not yet had an opportunity to bed-down and flourish. The closure of the MLA regional agencies also removed one tier of bureaucracy from the old model and has allowed for more streamlined decision making between MLA, regional boards and Hubs. These recommendations, if enacted, arguably introduce a new level of complex bureaucracy and a new voice in an already overcrowded and complex national landscape, and remove a vital regional voice.

4. The MLA response to the Review's recommendations

MLA will consult with key stakeholders including Hub museums, DCMS and local authorities over these recommendations. Any changes that are agreed will be implemented in time for the 2011-14 planning round. However, it is not supportive of the need for a new national board.

Related recommendations: R8.1-8.3

Implementation

A series of recommendations have been suggested concerning the management of the programme by MLA. Many of the recommendations in this area correspond to past shortcomings that have been, or are in the process of, being addressed (see Section 4). Nevertheless many of these recommendations are useful in supporting MLA to drive through the changes currently being implemented, and can be a check against them.

MLA will carefully check these recommendations against its own changes and use them to further improve the management of the programme. We will involve Hub partners in testing these recommendations.

Related recommendations: R7.4-8, R9.1, R9.2, R10.1, R10.2, R12.1, R.12.2, R13.1, R13.2, R15.1-6, R16.1-3, R17, R18.1-5, R19, R20.1-5

5. Process for implementation

Following Board acceptance of the report, and the accompanying response from MLA an implementation programme will be put in place. This will use the 2011-14 funding cycle as its deadline.

July 2009	Publication of Renaissance Review, MLA response to the Review and the National Action Plan for Museums.
June – July 2009	Consideration of implementation recommendations against existing MLA changes. Agreed approach to consultation of other recommendations.
July 21 2009	MLA Board presented with timetable and procedures for consulting on and considering recommendations.
August – December 2009	Consultation with key stakeholders of Governance and New Frameworks recommendations. Consideration of how new Renaissance methodologies are working.
January 2010	Board make decision on implementation of Governance and New Frameworks recommendations.
April 2010 – March 2011	Following consultation, looking at trialling the “core museum” recommendation in one region.
February 2010 – August 2010	Preparation for implementation of further agreed recommendations.
September 2010 – March 2011	Implementation of further agreed recommendations as part of 2011 – 2014 business planning cycle.

6. The MLA and programme delivery

6.1 Background

The Renaissance Review was commissioned by the MLA Board in early 2008. It was recognised that the programme was of fundamental importance to the museum sector in England and that there had been no complete review of its working since its instigation in 2002. At the same time the Board also ordered a comprehensive transformation of the MLA itself. Instigation of these reforms reflected a view of the Board and elsewhere that the MLA needed to become more effective. Added impetus stemmed from reductions in funding and a requirement to comply with government policy in relation to reducing office space in London.

It follows that the Review has run alongside major changes in the MLA. These have included the development of:

- Stronger leadership and governance.
- A simplified but strategic and directed model for business planning.
- The closure of Regional Agencies to create a single integrated team working nationally and regionally.
- Relocation of the head office to Birmingham.
- Replacement of the majority of senior staff and the creation of a new vision and purpose for the “new MLA”.

Renaissance represents over 75 per cent of MLA's funding and is its prime mechanism for driving improvement in the museum sector. Renaissance is now integrated into every aspect of MLA strategic management and the management and delivery of the programme has been reorganized.

There is still more to do before the vision for Renaissance has been delivered in full across England. However, MLA, with its partners, is now fully equipped to deliver this vision.

6.2 Core MLA approach and principles

MLA is committed to Renaissance, and to maximising the benefits it brings to the public. Key principles underpin our delivery of the programme:

- From Board consideration down to day-to-day working procedures, Renaissance is integrated with the wider MLA strategic vision and our desire to work hand in hand with local government, to drive improvement in cultural services.

6. The MLA and programme delivery

- MLA seeks to maximise product over process, and will continually check to ensure the processes associated with Renaissance are as simple as possible so resources are concentrated on front-line delivery.
- However, strategic vision must be linked directly and visibly with investment, impacts and outcomes. This will be achieved through transparent monitoring, research and evaluation.
- Although Renaissance funding is aimed at strengthening regional museum services, the strategies designed to maximise its effect must sit within a wider understanding of the way culture, particularly within the local authority context, can be used to benefit individuals and communities.

6.3 Strategic direction

During 08/09 the MLA Board and its Executive restated the vision for Renaissance and agreed strategic outcomes for the programme that were in turn aligned to MLA overall objectives.

The MLA took a holistic approach both to how Renaissance could deliver improved and measurable impact while building on established success. Therefore during the 2009/11 business planning MLA was more prescriptive than in previous years in defining what it expected Hubs to deliver across five priorities:

- Developing capability within the workforce.
- Ability of museums to exploit collections for wider benefit.
- Sustainability.
- Partnerships.
- Excellence.

A second stage of the 2009-11 planning round provided the opportunity to articulate new priority areas. MLA required Hubs to identify innovative ways of delivering benefits to users by exploring approaches outside traditional museum models. In particular encouragement was given to the development of new partnerships that bring truly new ways of working, and new investment to the sector, that directly address current national and regional government priorities. Many of these mirror recommendations in the Review.

Hubs were encouraged to develop links with strategic regional partnerships, and crucially with local authorities. Importance was also placed upon the need to embrace national agendas, for example 2012, and closer working with national museums.

6. The MLA and programme delivery

Underpinning all is a commitment to continuous improvement and excellence. This funding phase offered a unique and timely opportunity to demonstrate to a wider audience how Renaissance, and the Hub partners, can deliver transformation across a wide range of public agendas.

6.4 Regional input and programme management

Eight of the nine independent regional MLA agencies have been closed down and replaced by smaller and fully integrated MLA Field Teams based on three areas plus London. London will be fully integrated into this model by April 2010. The affects on the management and accountability of the Programme are profound. Now MLA Area Directors, who sit on the Executive Board, help ensure coherent accountability of the Programme at a regional level, in a way that is consistent with national strategic leadership.

The Field Team staff work alongside a new team of Renaissance project colleagues at MLA to support Hubs in the development and delivery of business plans and providing a clear strategic context for Renaissance to operate in at a regional and local level.

A project manager has been allocated to each of the MLA regions providing each Hub with a dedicated member of staff. Renaissance has been placed within a refocused Programme Delivery Directorate with a new Director and an emphasis on integration with other MLA functions.

6.5 Accountability and project monitoring

Funding agreements are being put in place with each recipient of Renaissance funds (not just Hub leads). These will identify specific performance targets, which will be linked to overall desired Renaissance outcomes and government targets for participation in culture.

MLA is putting in place procedures to monitor quarterly the delivery of Renaissance projects. A combination of performance indicators and monitoring of delivery plans will ensure museums deliver their agreed programmes. A new accounting model will now see Renaissance museums funded quarterly in arrears. For the first time MLA can show where every penny of the programme is being spent in terms of specific projects, priority areas, performance measurement and outcomes.

A new system for auditing Renaissance decision making and clearly communicating management decisions has also been implemented.

6. The MLA and programme delivery

6.6 Evidence gathering, research and usage

MLA's Research and Evidence team will ensure effective evidence is gathered about Renaissance activity and linked to other sources of research. This evidence will be used to guide decision-making to ensure Renaissance delivers the maximum benefit from available investment.

6.7 The Hubs

The changes described above have revealed different capacities in the nine Hubs. While some have transformed in terms of leadership and ability to develop true partnerships others have struggled to deliver on Renaissance's core aims. The Review recommendations may offer the opportunity to trial new models for delivering Renaissance in some regions. The MLA's new integrated Field Team offers the flexibility to concentrate support or direction where it is most needed. Those Hubs that are innovative and high achieving will be monitored with a lighter touch that fosters innovation and excellence, while others can receive more dedicated time to accelerate progress.

6.8 Commitment to delivery over process

It is important that in achieving robust accountability, maximum resources are used for the delivery of projects. Approximately 12 per cent of Renaissance costs are currently spent on programme delivery and management – this includes central MLA costs and Hub costs. Thus Renaissance programme costs are broadly in line with common expectations for delivering programmes of this nature. Nevertheless, MLA will explore ways of reducing management costs to the region of 10 per cent for future funding rounds.

6.9 Approach to business planning

Business planning methodologies have been reviewed, revised and reissued. The aim has been to enable the planning process to:

- Provide clarity and strategic direction.
- Provide clear regional and national information about what is being invested in and its outcome.
- Tie funding agreements to performance.
- Be quicker and better able to meet agreed deadlines.
- Be accountable and transparent.
- Dovetail into new MLA methodologies.
- Provide a clear audit trail of guidance and decision-making.

6. The MLA and programme delivery

The framework will enable MLA to analyse Renaissance activities and compare their impact against the outcomes, and crucially it will mean that Hub performance can be measured and monitored ensuring that Renaissance delivers the maximum benefit.

In order to reach this position by the start of the 2009/11 programme a period of intense planning activity was undertaken from autumn 2008. It was necessary to obtain key information against each activity including descriptions and evidence of need, impact on outcomes, Key Performance Indicators, additionality and sustainability. Hubs were invited to apply for funding allocations under a series of defined programme stands using pre-agreed templates. MLA will use this standard programme information as the basis for monitoring Hub performance and to meet external audit requirements. Business plans were assessed and appraised against the Renaissance objectives.

For the first time there is a direct link between overarching Renaissance strategic aims, the areas of museum activity that will be supported, the specific activities that will be undertaken and their cost to the programme, and the resulting impact these will have on museum users. A similar methodology is now being widened to cover non-Hub Renaissance activity.

With the new process now in place and strong measurable business plans agreed, future planning rounds will be straightforward and responsive to need.

7. Conclusion

Leading Museums: A vision and strategic action plan for English museums

The successful delivery of the Renaissance programme is a key component of the National Action Plan for museums that MLA has developed in consultation with DCMS.

Renaissance and the Action Plan help construct a single vision for the place of museums in society. Together, they put excellent museums that engage people and enrich lives at their heart. They emphasise the importance and potential of regional museums. The Action Plan identifies ten key areas designed to support excellence, promote partnerships and build capacity.

The challenge is to dismantle museum walls and display cabinets and reach out to people of all backgrounds and ages. Audiences and users want to be proactive co-producers, not passive consumers. Collections ought to reach beyond institutional walls so curators can increasingly share knowledge and collections to spread enjoyable forms of learning and tell stories in more engaging ways.

In challenging economic times the importance of Renaissance and the wider museum sector working in partnership to deliver the Action Plan, is amplified. The contribution the programme makes to the tourism industry, enabling huge improvements to the visitor product and marketing, is an excellent example.

MLA is putting in place a senior cross-sector working group to oversee the delivery of the Action Plan. It will publish a clear timetable for the consideration and implementation of the recommendations from the Renaissance Review.

We look forward to working in partnership to build on the success of Renaissance, and delivering a museum strategy across the country that increasingly puts people first.



MUSEUMS LIBRARIES ARCHIVES
COUNCIL

Leading strategically, we promote best practice in museums, libraries and archives, to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
Grosvenor House, 14 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2 5RS
T: +44 (0)121 345 7300 E: info@mla.gov.uk

www.mla.gov.uk

ISBN 978-1-905867-29-5