

DORSET NATURAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

LEARNING POLICY

July 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dorset County Museum is owned and managed by the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, and is committed to enhancing the public's understanding and enjoyment of Dorset through creative interpretation of the Museum's collections. This Learning Policy combines this with the principles of *Inspiring Learning for All* and recognises that excitement and motivation are the foundations for successful learning, and that Museum visits should be challenging and memorable experiences.

The role of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society is to improve physical and intellectual access to the building and its collections in order to reach as wide an audience as is possible. A range of informal learning opportunities will be provided for the various sectors of the Museum's audience and use of the Museum by schools and colleges will be encouraged and promoted. The role of learning is recognised as being fundamental in achieving a high level of visitor satisfaction, and learning considerations should be integral to the running of the Museum.

2. AIMS

- To further the study of Dorset's human and natural history in accordance with the objectives of the Museum and engage with new and diverse users.
- To enhance the education of children and adults through the imaginative use of the Museum and its resources, helping each person to find their own level of intellectual, physical and emotional engagement with the collections.
- To engage and consult with a broad range of people to develop new learning opportunities, and where opportunities arise, to work in partnership with a variety of external agencies to create new learning programmes and ensure a coherent and complementary learning offer in the West Dorset area.
- To promote the Museum as a centre for life long learning, meeting both informal and formal learning needs.
- To upgrade the use of technology and create environments that are conducive to learning and stimulate discovery.

- To promote the understanding of Museums and their role in contemporary society and promote the Museum as a place for learning and inspiration.
- To increase and diversify the range of items available for handling and study purposes.
- To increase public use of the Museum and its services by improving physical and intellectual access to the Museum.
- To ensure that all aspects of the Museum's interface with the public are 'user friendly' to all members of society regardless of age, gender, physical ability, social status or ethnic origin.
- To represent learning needs in the planning of all exhibitions, galleries, displays, and publications.
- To keep the public informed about the nature of the services provided and attract new audiences.

3. OBJECTIVES

- To maintain the offer of family-orientated workshops and activities provided during weekends and school holidays.
- To ensure that all labels and display panels comply with disabled access guidelines.
- To make the collections of the Museum accessible to a non-specialist audience by improving standards of display and interpretation.
- To introduce more hands-on exhibits within the displays.

4. TARGET AUDIENCES

- Members of the public visiting the Museum, encompassing all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds and abilities.
- Adult education groups
- Researchers
- Family groups
- Members of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society
- School and college groups

5. SCHOOLS EDUCATION

Our target audience for schools will mainly be from within the county boundary. The Museum will undertake to provide children with experiences they cannot gain in other ways. There must be an emphasis on spending time in the Museum's galleries, and on seeing and handling real museum objects.

- The visit should inspire children and place their classroom experience into context. Interpretative material and workshops should make reference to the National Curriculum.
- Workshops should recognise that people learn in different ways and there is a need to provide for all ages and abilities.
- All staff tasked with the development of the learning service will keep up to date, through access to professional journals and links with other organisation, with educational and curriculum developments and local education initiatives.
- All teachers and demonstrators involved in teaching school groups will be security cleared. All those employed to take workshops will be appropriately vetted and will be effective classroom practitioners.

6. EVALUATION

Dorset County Museum will seek to respond to visitor needs and wants through a continual process of open dialogue, consultation and evaluation.

- The effectiveness of learning provision will be subject to regular monitoring and evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative. This will include visitor surveys, questionnaires and detailed records of visitor figures.
- Dorset County Museum will seek to evaluate visitors' learning experiences in accordance with the guidelines set out by *Inspiring Learning for All*, and evaluation will encompass visitor enjoyment and understanding.
- Development of relationships with key user groups will play an important part in evaluating learning outcomes, and regular and open feedback will be shared between partners.
- The education and learning policy will be subject to regular review.