Creative Networks: Knowledge and Inspiration

The Victoria and Albert Museum’s Strategy for Learning
Creative Networks: Knowledge and Inspiration

The Victoria & Albert Museum’s Strategy for Learning

CONTENTS

Summary

1. The Museum’s Mission 1
2. Paradigms of Change 2
3. Responding to Change 4
4. The V&A’s Place in the World of Design and the Arts 7
5. The V&A’s Strategic Vision 10
6. The Learning Strategy 12
7. Actions to Implement the Strategy 14
8. Investment 17
9. Impacts 18
10. Next Steps 19

Annex I: Visitors’ Voices
CREATIVE NETWORKS: KNOWLEDGE AND INSPIRATION

The V&A’s Strategy for Learning

SUMMARY

1. The Museum’s mission. The V&A was born out of an idea, simple but revolutionary: that museums are centres for public learning. At a time of unprecedented social and technological change, there is a need for the V&A to show leadership by adapting creatively to this new environment by developing structures, networks and strategies for learning.

2. Paradigms of change. The cultural sector and the creative industries are at the centre of the new, knowledge economy, in which information is a low-value, low-skill resource, and social and economic value comes from the creative application of ideas. The burgeoning digital media enables us to participate in and personalise the world in new ways. The old boundaries between art forms, disciplines of learning, and cultural and educational institutions are breaking down, and strategic partnerships are creating consortia of meta-institutions.

3. Responding to change. Successful organisations are responding by investing in learning, creativity and new skills and literacies. In this environment design and practical education have become more, not less, important. The key organisational form for development of innovation is the network, not the institution, and museums like other institutions need strategies to give them focus and direction. Museums can also provide for those who want spaces for calm and contemplation.

4. The V&A’s place in the world of design and the arts. Recent analysis of the V&A’s audience data had revealed that the Museum is closely connected to the creative industries (14% of all visitors) and schools and colleges (27%). The V&A is already an seedbed for creativity in the U.K. Many of our visitors come to the V&A with expectations that they will be able to learn about design; participate actively in the galleries; study and research. They also expect that we will cater for their individuality and diversity. Almost all are internet-connected. The main attractants are exhibitions, events and activities, and a handful of newer galleries; the older galleries have limited appeal to the Museum’s audience.

5. The V&A’s strategic vision. The V&A faces severe competition from rival attractions. Over the last two decades the gulf between the resource-rich national museums (like the BM and Tate) and the relatively resource-poor (including the South Kensington museums) has widened significantly. The Museum has responded by redefining its vision and values to become more audience-centred, and by implementing new projects (including innovative new displays such as the Nehru, Tsui, Silver, Glass and British Galleries). It aims to increase visitor numbers to 1.2 million by April 2002.
6. **The Learning Strategy.** Many major national organisations (such as the BBC and the Arts Council) have made a decisive strategic shift to education. The V&A must do the same if it is to have a leadership role in the sector. The Museum’s national responsibilities, its collections, its role as a centre for all the arts, its historical mission, and its commitment to education, all support this development. The strategy aims to:

(i) re-state the museums’ commitment to public learning as its raison d’être

(ii) rebuild connections with schools, colleges, universities and the cultural sector

(iii) make the V&A a high impact (not just high numbers) museum, building the skills of its audiences

(iv) renew the Museum’s commitment to practice and the contemporary across all art forms and media

(v) develop the V&A as a centre for creativity, and a seedbed for the creative industries

(vi) develop the V&A’s identity as a national centre for innovation in arts education

(vii) provide high quality and consistent learning services, for all who want them

(viii) enhance the Museum’s role and influence in significant areas of the world (e.g. South Asia, China, Japan and the Commonwealth) and with selected regional museums (e.g. Sheffield)

(ix) contribute to the revival of South Kensington as a national cultural and educational centre

7. **Actions to implement the Strategy.** The best of the V&A’s current work, undertaken by many departments, already provide excellent examples for future development. What is mainly missing is co-ordination as well as the application of consistent standards. The following actions are needed and should be achieved within the next 5 years:

(i) development and implementation of a long term **audience research and evaluation strategy** for each of the Museum’s key audiences (families, schools, students, professionals in the creative industries, adult community groups, and other adults)

(ii) provision of a choice for visitors to take a **learning option** at any stage of their contact with the V&A, off-site, on-site or on-line
(iii) improvement of the “welcome” at the entrances, guiding visitors to the learning services they want

(iv) enlivening the galleries, exhibitions and other public spaces by introducing more learning activities, where possible with simple, low-cost interventions

(v) increasing the number and range of programmes and services to cater for a wider range of audiences, from those lacking confidence and skills, to experts

(vi) establishment of comprehensive on-site study and research facilities with support staff for a wider range of audiences from schoolchildren to professionals

(vii) investigation the Museum’s current and potential role in support of the U.K.’s creative industries and establish a project team to develop this area

(viii) development of V&A learning on-line, applying consistent learning principles across the Museum’s on-line services, and creating a digital media gallery as a focus for creative public activities with digital technologies

(ix) development and implementation of a strategy for access and social inclusion, addressing the main barriers to participation, under the guidance of a specialist team

(x) establishment of an Innovations programme with small working groups and research projects to bring the museum into closer contact with creative/practical ideas from outside the V&A

(xi) negotiation of strategic partnerships with, (for example), a global broadcaster, internationally recognised education research/learning institutions, and digital learning providers, as well as social/cultural research organisations

(xii) active involvement of the whole staff to develop the Museum as a learning organisation through training, working groups and secondments, as well as revising key policies and regular evaluation to ensure a user-focus.

The Museum must continue to monitor trends and identify emerging future developments, and amend the strategy and these actions as necessary.

8. **Investment.** Achievement of the strategy will require significant investment by the Museum. This will be done by redeployment of existing resources, as well as attracting additional funding and skills from outside. The main sources of additional resources will be:
(i) **development of skills of existing staff**, as well as external recruitment where these cannot be found internally

(ii) **a funding strategy for learning projects** to attract external public and charitable money as well as giving priority to learning in future allocations of grant-in-aid

(iii) allocation of **more varied spaces for learning** in the Masterplan for all audiences including schools, students, practitioners and community groups, for study and practical activities, including workshops, seminar rooms, public research facilities, and discovery and activity areas in galleries.

9. **Impacts and outcomes.** The Museum will develop targets, in line with those to be established by QUEST and other Government agencies, to specify the main impacts, outcomes and outputs expected. These will include impacts and outcomes for:

- Individual museum users (in different audience categories)
- creative industries
- communities
- the cultural/educational/digital media sectors
- Government, its agencies and the media

10. **Next steps.** These are:

- approval of the strategy
- development of a more detailed, costed action plan, for approval
- identification of targets against which to measure achievement of the strategy
- implementation from early Spring 2001

The Museum will disseminate the strategy in a summary version to major stakeholders in Government and the cultural and educational sectors.
CREATIVE NETWORKS: KNOWLEDGE AND INSPIRATION

The Victoria And Albert Museum’s Strategy For Learning

1. THE MUSEUM’S MISSION

1.1 Founded after the Great Exhibition of 1851, the V&A was born out of an idea, simple yet revolutionary: that museums are centres for public learning.

1.2 The Museum is engaged in what William Morris described as "the education of desire" - the stimulation of a wish to improve the quality of our lives. Objects and works of art have the power to move people's hearts and minds. These experiences can enrich, and even change, people's lives. It is the work of the Museum, by bringing together in partnership the expertise and skills of its public and its staff, to achieve this.

1.3 The V&A is the world's greatest museum of design and the arts. It is an international centre for scholarship and research and, for documentation and care of its collections. Its galleries display artefacts which are some of the finest historical cultural achievements of Europe, Asia and the Islamic world. It also holds many of the most innovative and influential examples of contemporary design.

1.4 Over the last ten years, the V&A has significantly improved its educational provision. It has redisplayed many of its most popular galleries. It has improved access to its collections through its new study rooms and stores. It has developed new services for schools and families and has addressed barriers to social inclusion (especially for South Asian, Chinese and local communities, and for visitors with disabilities). It has also developed closer links with design and arts practitioners and the creative industries.

1.5 The Victorian age was one of extraordinary institutional innovation. New forms of organisation - such as the South Kensington Museum itself - were created by a generation of visionary leaders. The V&A's mission to help people to see, to imagine, to learn, to create, to appreciate, to enjoy, and to shape the designed world, remains as relevant today as it was in 1851. So, too, is its tradition of practical education in design and the arts.

1.6 This is, again, a time of unprecedented social and technological change. There is a need for cultural institutions like the V&A to show leadership by adapting creativity to this new environment, and to develop new organisational structures, relationships and strategies for learning. We have been guardians of the past; now, like other public institutions, we must also become guardians of the future.
2. **PARADIGMS OF CHANGE**

2.1 **Change - the spirit of the age.** Change - rapid, complex, information-laden, multi-dimensional, unpredictable - is the defining characteristic of our age.

2.2 **The knowledge economy.** According to Charles Leadbeater (*Hargreaves and Christie, eds., Tomorrow’s Politics*), “in the twenty-first century, the engine of growth will be the process through which an economy creates, applies and extracts value from knowledge.” In this environment, information is like sand, the low-skill, low-value, raw material of the future. Will museums have the expertise to become innovators in the creation of new knowledge-based products, or merely providers of information for others to develop?

2.3 **The burgeoning cultural sector.** The creative industries – which range from architecture and design to broadcasting and the digital media – are growing at 5% per annum and constitute more than £60 billion to the UK economy. In London, the creative industries employ 400,000 people, 11% of the total workforce in the city. Many young independent creative entrepreneurs need cultural institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum to provide them with inspiration, opportunities to develop their skills, and contact with a wider public.

2.4 **Identity and diversity – personalising the world.** At one time, public services were designed for an undifferentiated public, and individuals were expected to fit in. In leisure, at work, in education, in entertainment, and as consumers, the public were often treated as passive recipients of products. This is changing. Most people want to contribute actively, not just to consume; to make a difference, not just be anonymous; and to give their own meaning to the world around them. A majority do not just want information; they seek experiences that are authentic and personal. They want public institutions to provide for their diversity and their preferences. New attitudes and ways of working, and new digital technologies, make it possible for museums to do this for individuals in increasingly subtle ways.

2.5 **Digital Media.** Computers are changing from complex and inflexible technologies to an accessible and popular mass medium for learning and creativity. Within five years, interactive learning on-line will be available to every individual in developed economies, and every community in developing countries. The new media are changing almost every aspect of the contemporary world, from our personal lives to the nature of public cultural institutions. Control of interpretation is moving from producers to consumers, from teachers to learners, from holders of cultural resources (such as museums) to users. To think of digital media purely in terms of virtual space is a serious misconception. The most significant transformations are those which result from the integration of these elements - digital media, people and environments. Museum galleries are some of the most powerful and exciting sites for this integration.

2.6 **Fusions.** The old boundaries between museums and galleries, libraries and other institutions; between formal education and informal and self-directed
learning, and between the public and private sectors – are breaking down. So, too, are the boundaries between disciplines. Learning, digital media and public policy initiatives, such as the Government’s social inclusion agenda, are creating connections between sectors across traditional boundaries.

In the digital age, we often have an audience of one

Nicholas Negroponte, Director of MIT Media Lab
3. RESPONDING TO CHANGE

3.1 The future is different from what we thought. The world of 2000 was in many ways inconceivable in 1990: few could have foreseen the demands it now places on us. Outlined here are some of the strategies which organisations and individuals must make if they are to meet the demands placed upon them in a constantly changing environment.

3.2 Learning. Learning has been defined as “a process of active engagement with experience (which) may involve an increase in skills, knowledge or understanding, a deepening of values or the capacity to reflect” (Campaign for Learning, 1998). The twentieth century was the age of formal education in the classroom; the twenty-first century is the age of personal learning at every stage in life. In 1998, The Learning Age, 1998 (DFEE), in a radical change in official policy, David Blunkett laid out his vision that learning will be as “universally available as public utilities like the telephone”, in “a society in which all our learning institutions and providers are linked purposefully to an agenda for the learning society.”. In fact, the cultural sector, not the education sector, is already the main source of learning for adults and families (MORI for the Campaign for Learning, 1998), and in consequence, museums and other cultural institutions are moving to the centre of public policy. The implications of these developments for museums and galleries are revolutionary and liberating.

3.3 Creativity. Creativity is at the core of the Government’s concept of culture. Tom Bentley (Education Futures, RSA, 1999) defines it as “the application of knowledge and skills in new ways to achieve a valued goal”. It is, then, the skilful application of knowledge and applies to every discipline. Christopher Frayling, Rector of the Royal College of Arts says, “you have to sow creativity in every aspect of life.” (Creativity Works, 2000). The Victoria and Albert Museum, uniquely in the UK, was founded as, and remains a centre for trans-disciplinary creativity and inspiration for:

(i) designers and other practitioners in the creative industries
(ii) innovators such as business people, across the spectrum of the economy, to create better, more desirable products
(iii) everyone – adults, students, children – to enjoy and develop their own creativity

3.4 New Skills and Literacies. There is a shift in funding and value from hardware (requiring technical skills) to content and software (requiring interpersonal, experiential, visual, oral and cultural skills). The Government looks to the cultural sector to help engage and educate the public in these new skills and literacies, and particularly museums and galleries. The Victoria and Albert Museum is a vital resource for the whole nation for learning the skills of practice of design and the arts, and many related disciplines.
3.5 **Design.** The quality of most experiences in life – such as systems, objects, communities and networks – depends upon good design. We live in a designed world, one which as it changes needs constant redesign by everyone – citizens as well as professionals. The skills of design will be notably important in the new economy, and may be the key skills in the 21st century. It is no coincidence that the number of product designers employed in the U.K. doubled between 1993 and 1998, and that the percentage of manufacturing businesses that regarded design to be an essential component of their work rose from 42% to 67% between 1995 and 1997 (Design Week, 17 July 1998). The Victoria & Albert Museum is a vital resource for the whole nation for learning the skills of practice of design and the arts, and many related disciplines.

3.6 **Practical education.** Most adults and children prefer to learn by making and doing in practical ways, and activities which involve practice of creativity and the arts are the most popular forms of all adult learning outside formal education. Many other countries (such as Singapore) recognise that in the 21st century practical creative education will be more, not less, important, and are significantly increasing the time and resources allocated to these in the curriculum. Yet, in the UK, the arts and other practical and technical disciplines have, over decades, been marginalized in the formal education system, and social changes mean that few children now learn practical skills in their families and communities. The Victoria and Albert Museum can be an important centre for practical education.

3.7 **Access and diversity.** Inequality of participation, and the inequalities of opportunity that underlie it, are a waste of human talent which successful societies and organisations can no longer afford to make. Recent projects (such as the V&A’s Post-16 Photography programme for ‘A’ level and GNVQ students funded by Canon) reveal that every individual is capable of fresh and original work. As Sir John Harvey Jones says, “Everyone has some talent…it is the job of the educator to find it.”

3.8 **Networking.** The key organisational form for development of innovation, says Tom Bentley, is the network. It sustains relationships, and challenges the traditional organisational forms which have allowed institutions to exist in isolation. As a national museum, the Victoria and Albert has a unique opportunity to act as a “bridging institution”, linking not just with museums but with major providers in other sectors – such as broadcasters, and higher education research and teaching institutions – which all share public learning on a fundamental connective purpose. By doing so, the V&A can extend its impact in ways that will not otherwise be possible.

3.9 **Strategy, not policy.** In an environment of change, cultural organisations need sharply defined strategies to give them the focus and direction they need to have their greatest impact. The Victoria and Albert Museum’s new strategy for learning is a positive response to society’s need for creative and cultural education.
3.10 **Alternative space.** Museums engage with communities around them, but they also provide alternative spaces for appreciation, contemplation and spiritual responses, for those in society who want such environments.

A creative design-based education could be hugely valuable in the future, where you’re not going to be in one box for the whole of your life…You’re going to have to be flexible and nimble on your feet. You’re going to have to write your own scenarios and work out ways of solving problems you’ve set yourself…I don’t think either higher education of business has cottoned on to that yet.

*Christopher Frayling in Creativity Works, 2000*

Is creativity some obscure, esoteric art form? Not on your life. It’s the most practical thing a businessman can employ

*Bill Bemach, in Creativity Works, 2000*
4. THE V&A’s PLACE IN THE WORLD OF DESIGN AND THE ARTS

4.1 People have their own reasons for using the Victoria and Albert Museum. These purposes can connect the Museum to the rest of their lives and to the other learning resources and institutions they use. The chart below shows our audience profile, which includes significant numbers of students and professionals.

The V&A’s audience in 1999 (total c900,000 p.a.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Professionals/Creative Industries</th>
<th>Adult/Community Groups</th>
<th>Other Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.2 **Expectations of learning.** More than 80% of V&A visitors (schoolchildren, students, professionals, adult and community groups, as well as a majority of family and other adult visitors) come with an expectation that they will learn, formally, informally or self-directly. National surveys in the sector confirm that the public believe that learning is the main reason for the existence and public funding of museums.

4.3 **Learning about design.** A high percentage of visitors (44% - schoolchildren, students, adult and community groups, and creative industries/education professionals) come to the Victoria and Albert Museum to study design and the arts for educational or professional purposes. Research for the British Galleries showed that over 60% of all adult visitors use the Museum as a resource for self-directed learning, as part of a sustained interest in the Museum’s subject and collections. The Museum has a central role in design education – both formal and informal – in the UK.

4.4 **Expectations of participation in galleries.** Audience research in the Silver Galleries discovery area and for the Sunday Extra programmes show consistently that a very high percentage of visitors (c90%) – regardless of their preferred learning style – enjoy participatory gallery activities and demonstrations and are more likely to return frequently if these are offered.

4.5 **Expectations of facilities for study and research in design and the arts.** A great majority of visitors (c 70%, including students, academic and professional users, many children and adult self-directed learners) come to the V&A for reasons that relate to study, whether for a school project, a PhD thesis, or inspiration for design in the creative industries.
4.6 **Other learning expectations.** Visitors come with a wide range of other expectations, as revealed by our visitor research:

- 85% of Victoria and Albert visitors are internet connected; nearly 100% are telephone connected; about a third want to get advice/guidance on their visit, including learning in advance, in order to plan/book their visit.

- The major attractions for visitors are (i) temporary exhibitions, (ii) programmes and activities, and (iii) specific galleries (Nehru, Tsui, Dress, Sculpture in particular).

- Visitors expect us to cater for their diversity (cultural background; educational advantage/disadvantage; preferred ways of learning; first language; type of disability; literacy levels; social background; poverty or wealth, and subject knowledge) Only 26% of adult visitors have studied the visual arts beyond age 16; 40% do not speak English as a first language, c 20% not at all.

- The main improvements requested by visitors are: (i) more comfort; (ii) better exhibits (including participatory exhibits); (iii) improved provision for children (iv) better trained staff.

All of these factors significantly determine whether or not visitors learn through the Victoria and Albert Museum. Most of these factors are within our control.

**The environment of design and arts education institutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clubs and societies</th>
<th>Creative Industries</th>
<th>Broadcasting and other media/distance learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peers and community</td>
<td>The Victoria &amp; Albert Museum and other cultural institutions</td>
<td>Work/Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home and family</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Colleges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7 **The V&A’s place in the environment of design and arts education.** The profile of the Museum’s audience, and its desire to learn through the
Museum’s disciplines and collections, show the Victoria and Albert Museum to be strongly connected to its mission. We have an opportunity to take a leading role in design and arts education in the UK, and to become in time a global brand in distance learning.

4.8 **Strategic partnerships.** Organisations which establish strategic partnerships with other educational, creative and cultural providers, and encourage their audiences to use their networks, will thrive. Those which do not will lose audiences and resources, become isolated from innovation in other organisations, lose expertise, be perceived to be irrelevant, and in the long term experience a spiral of decline.

4.9 **What people want.** For children and adults with a special interest in design and the arts, the boundaries between different kinds of cultural and educational institutions are irrelevant, the consequence of accidents of history and policy. They want connected services that make learning easy for them. It is the learning that these millions of individuals seek – formally or informally, individually or in groups, through all stages in life - that defines the Victoria and Albert Museum’s impact on society.
5. THE V&A’s STRATEGIC VISION

5.1 The Museum faces increasing competition and other threats from many sources. A gulf has emerged between the big, resource-rich, free national museums (British Museum, Tate Gallery, National Gallery) and the equally big, but relatively resource-poor, museums (like the Science Museum, the National History Museum and the V&A). This gulf has been exacerbated by unequal allocation of Lottery Funding and a shift in the focus of funding for cultural activities from South Kensington to the centre and east of London.

5.2 The V&A’s Strategic Vision. The Victoria and Albert Museum has addressed these challenges by defining a new vision for the future. Its strategic goals are:

- to help people to explore, enjoy and shape the designed world, so that they can explore the past, understand the present, record the contemporary and shape the future

- to inspire creativity, enabling people to change or influence the designed world (personally and professionally)

- to be a learning organisation for a learning society developing knowledge, expertise and competencies in both staff and museum audience

- to reach local, national and global audiences with London as the Museum’s community, England and the UK as its nation, and the whole world (not confined to the Museum’s traditional imperially defined collecting boundaries)

- to be easily accessible to everyone digitally and, so far as possible, physically.

5.3 Values. The Museum is also working towards the achievement of the following values:

- Excellence in all aspects of our work, including excellence in the learning experience of all our users

- Becoming audience-centred, accommodating diversity and communicating this internally and externally; accessible, inclusive and multicultural; reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of UK society.

- Providing a seamless, high quality service efficiently and effectively

- Being innovative and forward looking, always looking to find new and better ways to achieve the Museum’s mission
• Bring clear and consistent, to ensure that the ability to be fast moving and flexible is matched by good planning

• Developing the capacities and skills needed to learn from others, treating everyone (external and internal) as individuals who can all make a contribution

5.5 **Priorities for audience development.** It is our goal to increase the number of visitors to South Kensington to 1,200,000 by March 2002, giving first priority to students and professionals in the creative industries and education; then to families and adult visitors (further targets are being agreed with DCMS as part of the Museum’s Funding Agreement). These targets provide a framework for the V&A’s learning strategy.

Knowledge informs us, ideas liberate us, but values civilise us….a value is a set of principles which are consistent and direct out thoughts, actions and activities…education without values is likely to be empty, irresponsible and without application to the contemporary world.

*Professor B.J. McKittrick, Values in Education, 1997*
6. THE LEARNING STRATEGY

6.1 The cultural sector. A number of major cultural institutions are repositioning themselves strategically in response to their changing environment, and in order to attract additional funding from Government, the Lottery, trusts and foundations, and sponsors. The Arts Council and the BBC have, within the last year, been allocated hundreds of millions of pounds of additional funding by Government principally to enable them to implement ambitious national and global education strategies. The Victoria and Albert Museum has credibility with Government as a leader in the sector, and needs now to build upon this.

6.2 A quantum change. There is a revolution going on. The organisations above - and many others - have made a quantum, not an incremental, change. It is vital that the V&A becomes a leading player in this new learning environment. By doing so, clearly, publicly and with commitment, it will be the first national museum to do so and take strategic advantage. More important, it will reclaim and fulfil its original purpose, the source of its best work over the last century and a half.

6.3 The V&A’s educational identity. The Museum has a unique and significant strategic educational identity. This is a result of:

   • its role as a national museum, with leadership responsibilities to other regional and national cultural organisations in its field;

   • its unique resources of collections, skills and knowledge; these integrate all art forms, from design, craft and the visual arts, to performance and media arts;

   • its historical mission, and commitment to public education for designers, citizens, and the designers and citizens of the future

6.4 The Museum’s learning strategy. This aims to:

   • restate the Museum's commitment to public learning - formal and informal, at each stage of an individual's life - as the Museum's main purpose and rationale, a key element in its brand identity, a core component of all public programmes, and a responsibility of all staff

   • develop connections with the school, college and university sectors, and with UK cultural and educational organisations with global reach

   • make the V&A a high impact (not just high numbers) museum, building skills not just communicating basic information

   • renew our commitment to practice, to the integration of art forms, to the contemporary, and to the diverse communities which are our audience
• become a centre for creativity in learning, supporting the creative industries and acting as a seedbed for new and emerging creative talent

• develop the V&A’s identity as a national centre in arts education

• provide high quality, consistent and accessible learning services for everyone who wants them, in ways (so far as possible) they can shape to their own needs

• identify regions of the world of long term strategic significance to the Museum (e.g. South and South East Asian, China, Japan, commonwealth and US) and; at a national level, with selected regional museums as well as V&A branches

• contribute to the revival of South Kensington a national cultural and educational centre.

Most importantly, our ability to thrive depends on our capacity to learn…The demand for creativity is driven mostly by the birth of a knowledge-based economy…The creative use of knowledge is becoming one of the defining tests of individual and organisational success.

Tom Bentley, Education Futures, RSA, 1999
7. ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGY

7.1 Educationally, the V&A is already doing many of the things it should. The best of the Museum’s services already provide practical examples of what the V&A could be like if it developed its’ learning provision. But, taken together, as a co-ordinated programme. The actions proposed here would represent a radical transformation of the Museum. No other UK museum has yet made this commitment or taken this step.

7.2 Practical steps are needed in order to start to implement the strategy. The following could be achieved within 5 years:

(i) **Audience research and evaluation.** Develop an audience research and evaluation strategy (including revamping of market research) and audience development plan to achieve agreed audience targets; systematically review the needs of each key audience

(ii) **The “learning option” initiative.** Identify and implement the most important steps needed to bring consistency to visitor/user learning services from marketing and arrival on-site to the gallery experience and on-line services.

(iii) **Entrances.** Develop the Museum’s “welcome”, including information and advisory services at the entrances, with resources and trained staff to guide visitors to choices which meet their needs

(iv) **Galleries, exhibitions and other public spaces.** Use the British galleries, once open, as a model for the development of the design of galleries and their operation; identify a group of existing permanent galleries which could be enhanced at limited cost, including the introduction of small discovery areas/mobile discovery points, and selective relabelling; animating the galleries with trained interpretative staff

(v) **Programmes and services.** Increase the number and range of programmes and services for all key audiences, catering for differences in skills, learning styles and intelligence; introduce with greater scope for creativity and progression in further learning, and strong practical design and arts opportunities for V&A priority audience.

(vi) **Study/research.** Establish more on-site study/research facilities and support staff for a wide range of audiences, from schoolchildren to specialists and professionals, including study areas in galleries and on-line services.

(vii) **Creative industries and practitioners.** Following investigation of their needs (above) establish a project team to develop services and facilities for these and educational and other professionals who use the Victoria and Albert Museum for work-related purposes.
(viii) **The Museum on-line for learning.** Based on recent Victoria and Albert Museum initiatives, develop V&A learning on-line; apply consistent learning principles to the whole on-line Museum including the web-site; develop a digital media space(s) in the galleries as a focus for our commitment to the medium; in parallel improve telephone information.

(ix) **Access and social inclusion.** Complete and implement a strategy and plan for access and social inclusion in line with the Government policy, which addresses the main barriers to participation. Conduct research to provide an accurate baseline on current participation of under-represented groups and monitor change; appoint a disability specialist to the staff and a working group to implement the plan.

(x) **Innovations.** Establish an Innovations programme with a small working groups and projects, to bring Victoria and Albert Museum into contact with creative, practical ideas and people from outside the institutions through seminars, public programmes and special initiatives.

(xi) **Strategic partnerships.** Actively seek strategic partners, and aim as a first step to have three key partnerships with internationally recognised cultural and educational institutions (such as, broadcasters, education research/teaching institutions selected regional museums/libraries, on-line digital learning providers, or independent policy/research organisations) in place by the end of 2001; then broaden to include social/cultural policy bodies.

(xii) **The learning organisation.** Actively involve as many staff as possible in practical delivery of learning

* at every stage of our contact with visitors (first contact/advice/guidance/protection/a marketing/press coverage/on-line/e-mail/welcome/orientation/in galleries /in learning programmes/follow-up after a visit, etc.)

* through training and development for a large number of staff to enable them to fulfil their educational role

* by use of working groups and secondments

* in improvement of services through regular monitoring and evaluation

* in revising key policies to ensure a user-focus

7.3 The above will take time to implement. This is a strategy for five years and more, not just a year or two. It is also a beginning, not an end; we must
continue to identify trends and emerging future developments, and amend the strategy as necessary.

The purpose of knowledge is action

*Traditional Chinese saying*
8. INVESTMENT

8.1 Achievement of the strategy will require significant fresh investment of resources by the Museum in learning. Because of resource pressures on the institution, this needs to be done by redeployment of existing resources, as well as attracting additional funding and skills from outside.

8.2 The main sources of new resources could be:

- **development of staff** from across the institution, as well as recruitment externally where skills cannot be found internally;

- **a funding strategy** for learning development to include bids to the Lottery, research councils, trusts, foundations and other external sources, as well as giving priority to learning in future allocations of grant-in-aid;

- **allocation of spaces for learning** within the Masterplan, to provide facilities for study and practical activities in and around the galleries for a range of audiences including schools, students, practitioners and community groups (these include workshop, seminar and other teaching rooms; public research facilities with study collections; and discovery and activity areas in galleries)

8.3 We must be as entrepreneurial as the best public and private sector organisations in resourcing and managing development of learning, and work in creative partnership with them.
9. IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES.

9.1 **Targets** will be developed in line with those to be established by QUEST and other Government agencies to specify the main impacts, outcomes and outputs expected. These may be summarised as follows:

- **Individual Museum users**: high levels of awareness, pleasure, learning and creativity, stimulation and inspiration to continue to learn, at the Victoria and Albert Museum or elsewhere, as declared/recognised/signalled by participants.

- **Creative industries/practitioners**: inspiration for their work and other support.

- **Communities**: some enhancement (as perceived by their representatives) to the life of the selected communities; achieve a sense of ownership of the Museum, with pleasure and familiarity.

- **Cultural sector/education/digital media sector(s)**: Victoria and Albert Museum perceived by their representatives to be a leading player in their field.

- **Government, its agencies and the media**: achieve recognition as one of the key museums for learning.

9.2 These statements of impact and outcome will be revised in line with the Museum’s overall plans for development.
10. **NEXT STEPS**

10.1 The key steps required are:

- agreement on the strategy, amended as necessary
- development of a more detailed costed plan for implementation, for approval
- identification of specific impacts, outcomes and targets
- implementation from early 2001

10.2 The museum will disseminate this strategy within the institution and to major stakeholders in our own and other sectors, as part of the Museum’s relaunch of itself as a visitor-centred institution.

In a world awash with knowledge, it is insight and understanding that will set apart successful companies...Most of the value of most companies comes from “stealth assets” – intangible assets such as brands, research and development, and intellectual capital that is not recorded on any company balance sheet – what’s in people’s heads...Knowledge. The future will be trans-disciplinary.

*Charles Leadbeater, Living on Thin Air, 1999*
### Annex I

#### Visitors’ Voices

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Every time I come here I am overwhelmed by how good the Victoria and Albert Museum is. I am a student and you seem to go out of your way to help people studying. Your postcards are affordable and the free entry is a massive help…. [Student]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>This is a truly wonderful museum in which to explore and learn. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Your thoughtfully planned Mid-autumn Festival programme resolved my homesickness. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>It would be nice to have someone you could go to and say “Could you come with me and show me this”. That would be a real luxury. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>It would be nice to see someone making shoes, or watch a blacksmith. It would keep a lot of people interested. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The best thing? Spending time with my mum or on my own. [School student]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The most enjoyable thing? Making something which will help other people understand what our lives are like. [School student]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I think if the Victoria and Albert Museum are doing it, it’s going to be good and I’m going to learn something. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>It [museum programme] had a lot to offer to younger people who never had a choice. It got a lot of young people off the streets into a lovely new project. [Young person]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I was enthralled last summer and autumn to see Colin Mantripp, a living artist craftsman at the Victoria and Albert Museum, displaying his craft in the act of creation among all the creations of past artists. It was such an amazing experience and for me the afterglow remained long afterwards. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>It was a great relief to be able to touch something [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Splendid idea. More of the same please – all crafts – hands on. [Visitor]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>