

## AMGUEDDFA CYMRU NATIONAL MUSEUM WALES VISITOR EXPERIENCE STRATEGY 2018 -2021



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## 1. Introduction

'Histories of museums often neglect the viewpoint of visitors, concentrating instead on the protagonists in power relations that have shaped the organisation...

...the intentions of museum founders, pronouncements of boards, interferences of politicians, aspirations of directors, imaginations of architects, acquisitions of curators, discoveries of researchers and objectives of educators. The voice of the visitor, for whom all this energy is ultimately expended, is rarely heard...'<sup>1</sup>

This is a document for all our staff. Even though some of us don't interact with our visitors on a daily basis, **the decisions we make and the way we work has an impact on our visitors' experiences at our museums**. We considered the potential impact on the Welsh language as we developed this Strategy and have explored ways of enhancing our use of the Welsh language as part of the overall bicultural experience for our visitors.

This document outlines our ambitions for Visitor Experience between 2018 and 2021. It defines our responsibilities to our visitors, through a **Customer Service Charter**. It provides guidelines for upholding these responsibilities, through specific **Aims** and **Objectives**. This strategy outlines how we will **maintain and share good practice**, how we will improve visitors' experiences by making specific changes, and how we will measure our success.

This document draws from extensive research, evaluation, consultation and benchmarking. Staff at all seven museums and the Collections Centre have given their feedback – as well as the visiting public, non-visitors and critical friends from the museums sector and beyond.

This strategy will be implemented through the Visitor Experience Group, which holds overall responsibility for Visitor Experience.

There will be aspects of Visitor Experience to **celebrate**, aspects in need of **change** and aspects to **challenge**. You may be asked for your input or participation as the Visitor Experience Group works through the strategy's recommendations in order of priority. Of course, as visitor expectations change in the future, this document will be reviewed as required.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Hicks; 'A whole new world': the young person's experience of visiting Sydney Technological Museum; Museum and Society 3, 2005

## 2. Definition and Context

### 2.1 What is Visitor Experience?

In general 'Visitor Experience' is used to describe finite and large-scale capital projects, carried out by public-facing institutions, seeking to increase visitor numbers and improve the impression they make on their visitors. For example, recent Visitor Experience initiatives such as the British Museum 'connection spaces' (Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners) or 'Profiad yr Ymwelydd' at the National Library of Wales (James Jenkins Partnership) have concerned themselves with the reconfiguration of public-facing spaces to improve accessibility, orientation and ambience, and to facilitate income generation.

In addition to large-scale changes to the fabric of museums, 'Visitor Experience' can be understood as smaller, day-to-day interactions with our visitors – and as such the definition has broadened considerably. In order to better understand this emerging, more nuanced definition, Visitor Experience expert Elissa Frankle developed a model based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which illustrates how visitor needs can be segmented and understood (fig. 1). It supposes that, in order to meet visitors' 'higher' needs, assurances about safety, accessibility and basic psychological needs must first be met<sup>2</sup>.



Figure 1 Frankle's Hierarchy of Visitor Needs, 2016

When surveyed on our own perceptions of Visitor Experience, staff reflected this broader, more practical definition. In addition to factors such as ambience, orientation and customer service, staff valued factors such as pre-visit orientation, catering for visitors with complex or additional needs, digital media and staff diversity (see figs. 2 and 3).

<sup>2</sup> E. Frankle, [Maslow in Museums](#), Museum365, 2016

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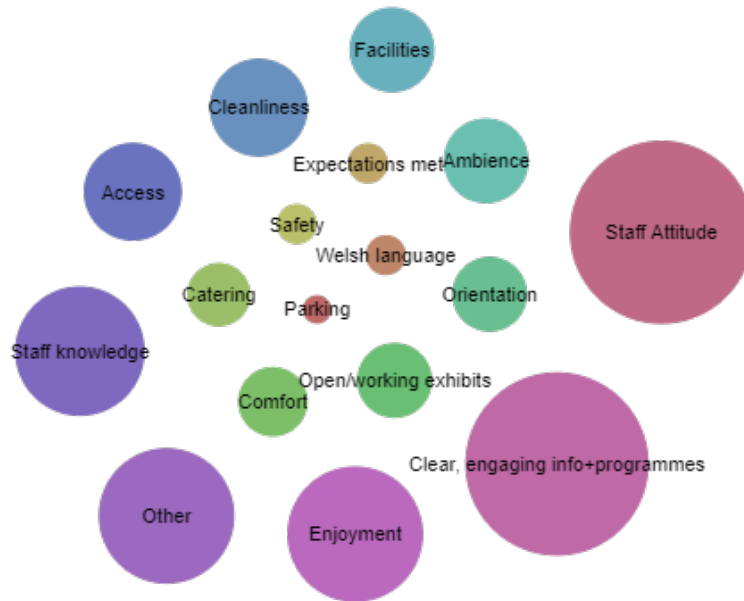


Figure 2: ‘What are the most important aspects of Visitor Experience?’ Staff consultation, 268 responses

When surveyed on areas of Visitor Experience that can go overlooked or unacknowledged, staff gave thoughtful responses on topics such as the emotional impact a museum can make, walking routes and local knowledge – as well as the importance of the Welsh language. This is a strong indication that, as a workforce, we maintain a deep and nuanced understanding of factors that contribute to delivering and maintaining good practice in Visitor Experience.



Figure 3: ‘What aspect of Visitor Experience can go overlooked or unacknowledged?’ Staff consultation, 130 responses

In light of these responses, this strategy includes in its definition of Visitor Experience the everyday actions, interactions and transactions that have an impact on the quality of visitors’ experiences at our museums, and on their overall impression of Amgueddfa Cymru as a trusted, quality brand.

## 2.2 Contextualising Visitor Experience

This strategy is underpinned by our Vision for 2015-25 – Inspiring People, Changing Lives – which prioritises Prosper, Experience, Learn and Participate.

The document builds on great work carried out at all our museums, evidenced by the attainment of Investors in People at six of our museums, as well as our participation in high-profile user-led programmes such as the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's programme More and Better and the Heritage Lottery Fund scheme Kick the Dust. Additionally, our good practice in visitor care and engagement has been acknowledged by a number of awards and quality marks, such as the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Mark, the Visit Wales Best Story Award and TripAdvisor's influential Certificates of Excellence.

Good practice in Visitor Engagement and participation has also been outlined and explored in our Audience Development Plan, Interpretation Strategy and Community Engagement Strategy. Links to these documents can be found in **Appendix B**.

In addition to organizational initiatives, awards and quality schemes, we also have at our disposal a number of external documents that support our aims to improve and maintain good practice in Visitor Experience at all levels. For example, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act outlines key priority areas where museums can make a meaningful contribution to the lives of people in Wales. The Welsh Government's Review of Amgueddfa Cymru, written by Dr Simon Thurley CBE, contains specific recommendations addressed by the **Aims** and **Objectives** contained in this strategy. Links to these external documents can also be found in **Appendix B**.

This strategy also must conclude that, though we maintain a considerable understanding of good practice in Visitor Experience, we need to establish better, more practical ways to **put this knowledge into action** consistently across the organization.

Without consistent processes for evidencing, reporting and analysing visitors' experiences at our museums, we cannot currently benefit from a full picture of visitors' experiences across our museums and sites. Developing consistency in how Visitor Experience is discovered, recorded, actioned and amplified will allow us to build from the benchmark contained in this strategy. In this respect, this strategy attempts to provide a contextual benchmark for our work on Visitor Experience from this point forward. Outlined in the Aims and Objectives are strategic guidelines that will not only maintain and share existing good practice, but **enable our understanding of Visitor Experience to grow and develop**.

## 2.3 Challenges

- **Each museum is different**

Every museum has its own personality, with particular areas of strength and expertise. This also means that there are environmental, infrastructural or historical challenges facing each museum as they work to maintain and improve Visitor Experience. As such, a ‘one size fits all’ solution may not always be appropriate.

Conversely, these areas of strength and expertise present **ample opportunities to share our skills** and knowledge across our museums – for example in the provision of orientation for adults with dementia (at Big Pit), young people with Asperger’s syndrome (National Waterfront Museum), students (National Slate Museum) or the provision of information in languages other than Welsh and English (National Museum Cardiff). However due to the geographical distance between museums, devising means of sharing this expertise will take considerable logistical planning.

- **Our budgets are tight**

We have seen cuts in our core funding over the last five years. Alternative funding sources may be restricted to specific types of projects, for example high-visibility capital projects rather than day-to-day maintenance, repairs and training. This means that the drive to improve and maintain Visitor Experience will need to come from **colleagues working together** to make small, efficient changes to how we work, measuring the impact of those changes and sharing good practice with one another.

- **Visitor feedback systems need updating**

There is a considerable amount of good practice in Visitor Experience at Amgueddfa Cymru, however our reporting procedures and customer relationship management systems are in need of rationalisation. We benefit from an excellent public reputation, online and offline, however our internal feedback discovery and reporting procedures are focused disproportionately on the very small amount of negative feedback we receive. As a result, resources and organizational attention are likewise diverted to the very small minority of visitors who report a poor visiting experience.

This has enabled assumptions about our visitors to go unchallenged, internally and externally among our stakeholders. Fortunately, advances in digital technology may provide means to discover, gather and analyse visitor feedback more efficiently, **allowing the organization to benefit from a fuller, more accurate picture** of our visitors’ experience.

- **Small changes add up over time**

Decisions about how we change and add to orientation spaces are diffused across the organization, and sometimes these changes are implemented ‘on the day’ without consideration of their wider impact. Orientation spaces suffer from ‘feature creep’ – the addition of unbranded paper signage, temporary displays, leaflet racks, cash points, certificates, temporary storage etc. While there is justification for each individual addition, when viewed together they create **cluttered spaces that make too many ‘asks’** of our visitors, instead of providing them with the information they need and the services they want to access. Tools such as Frankle’s Hierarchy of Needs (fig. 1) will enable us to assign an order of priority to the messages we want to convey to our visitors, improving not only their overall experience but the **crucial first impression** our museums make.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 What we discovered: Surveying Staff and Visitors

Below is a narrative summary of how our visitors and staff responded to questions about Visitor Experience, through staff consultations and visitor surveys.

Consultation and surveying offered us insight into the **wealth of good practice** taking place at all our museums, and highlighted areas where we could challenge old habits. They prompted us to look a little closer at our own attitudes towards our visitors: how they feel about us, what they know about us and, most importantly, the quality of the experience they have had at our museums.

**Staff Consultations** were designed to capture information from a variety of professional perspectives – from colleagues who work with visitors every day, such as Museum Assistants, cleaners and craftspeople, to members of staff whose decisions have wide-ranging impacts on visitors' experiences at our museums, such as directors, trustees and senior managers.

**Visitor Surveys** were designed in response to staff consultation, to further explore and challenge our organizational attitudes towards our visitors. We also consulted non-visitors – specifically those interested in cultural experiences, but who had not visited any of our museums. We received over 800 responses and, along with the results of the staff consultation, they form the **first dataset dedicated to measuring Visitor Experience across our museums**. It can be read in full in Appendix C.

The strategy's **Aims** and **Objectives** found in section 4 result from detailed analysis of this dataset.



### 3.2 Rating Visitor Experience at Amgueddfa Cymru

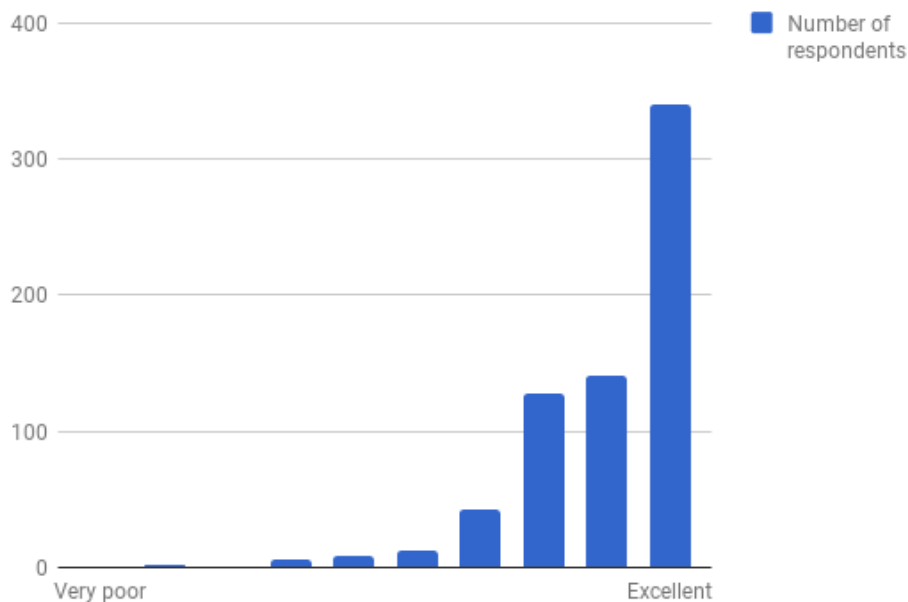


Figure 4: 'Overall, how would you rate your experience at our museums?' (Visitor survey, 681 responses)

In our visitor survey, **95% of visitors rated their experience at our museums as 'excellent'**. This strong, positive trend is also reflected in the visitor satisfaction research presented in the Thurley Review of Amgueddfa Cymru, which considered a wider sample of visitors by site using front-end data from TripAdvisor<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, market research conducted on behalf of the Marketing Visitor Profile Survey in 2015 reported that **97% of those surveyed would recommend our museums to friends and family**<sup>4</sup>. As a family of museums, we provide an overall excellent visitor experience to a wide variety of audiences. When asked to describe their overall impression of Amgueddfa Cymru fewer than 2% of responses were negative sentiments:

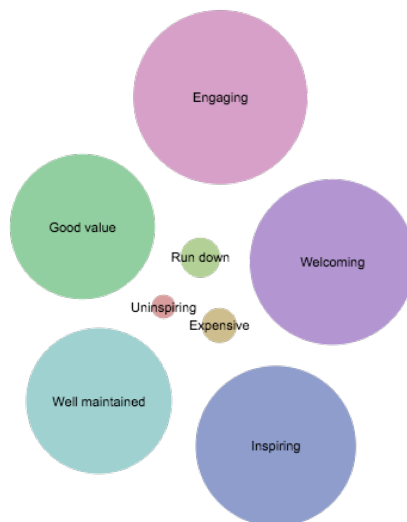


Figure 5: 'Choose three words to describe your overall impression of our museums' (Visitor Survey 1,890 responses)

<sup>3</sup> Simon Thurley CBE, Review of Amgueddfa Cymru, pp 7-16

<sup>4</sup> Visitor Profile Survey, 2015, Amgueddfa Cymru

However when surveyed on our own internal attitudes towards visitor feedback, and our perception of visitors' experience, 52% of surveyed managers Agreed or Agreed Strongly that we take negative feedback too seriously, with 40% reporting that **resources are focused on addressing the very small amount of negative visitor feedback** we receive. There are currently no systems in place to ensure staff working across the organization, in a variety of disciplines, are able to make regular, strategic use of the wealth of testimonials, recommendations and praise we receive.

When looking at our own existing records of visitor experience, we discovered that there had been no cohesive attempt to draw together a picture of visitor experience across the organization. Further enquiry revealed that a considerable amount of positive visitor feedback goes completely unreported. Asked about their most memorable positive feedback, 22% of staff responded that they did not report it, even informally among colleagues.

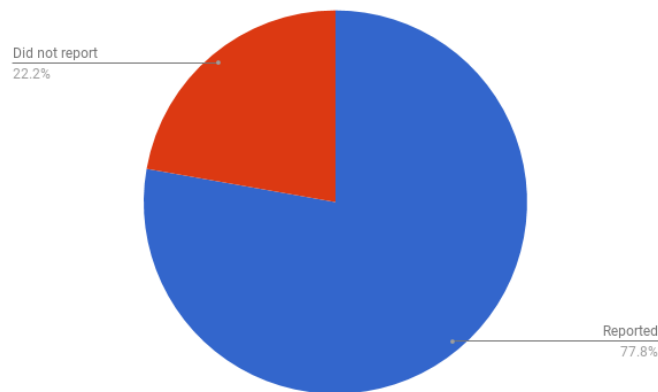


Figure 6: Thinking of the most memorable positive feedback you received during your career at the museum: Did you report or record it? (Staff Consultation, 99 responses)

The 78% of recorded positive feedback was spread haphazardly across a variety of reporting systems – some physical, some digital – with a small amount (13%) being used in formal reports, case studies and marketing testimonials. Considering the growing dominance of testimonial and influencer marketing, this is an area of unfulfilled potential. By far the most popular means of sharing positive feedback was verbally, with colleagues, with no further action taken. In order to improve our understanding of Visitor Experience, and to leverage the excellent feedback to generate cultural capital and income, we will need to develop robust processes that enable good practice and good feedback to create a more lasting positive impact.

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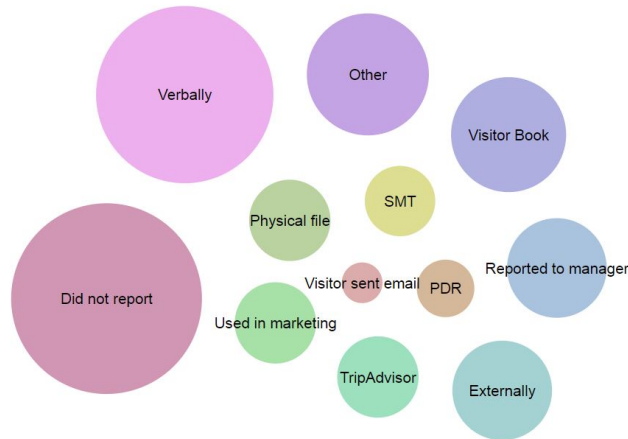


Figure 7: 'Thinking of the most memorable positive feedback you have received during your career at the museum, how did you report it?' (Staff Consultation, 99 respondents)

There are a number of systems, internal and external, that currently allow visitors to rate their experiences at our museums. Each system has its strengths and drawbacks:

- **Paper visitor books and feedback cards** allow a self-selecting sample to provide spontaneous responses, in the language of their choice. Transcribing and analysing these responses, however, are extremely time-consuming, especially as we consider staff time on an organizational level.
- Services such as **TripAdvisor** are trusted brands and offer persuasive visitor testimonials and quality marks. We benefit from an excellent reputation on these platforms. Unfortunately, these proprietary systems mean that we can only access 'front end' information and anecdotal feedback, with no insight given into underlying data, which would allow us to gain a better understanding of demographic, geographic or economic trends.
- **Website comments, physical follow-ups, letters and e-mails** to staff provide a great opportunity to make lasting personal connections with groups and communities in the long term. However this feedback is stored in disparate locations, in a variety of media, and is reported in a wide variety of ways according to departmental reporting structures and priorities.

The Thurley Review's recommendations on data capture, visitor cultivation and specific guidance to procure a Customer Relations Management (CRM) system will provide considerable benefits to our ability to **consolidate and leverage the huge amount of positive feedback we receive**. A CRM system will allow us to collate and understand visitor responses, and develop practical frameworks to action relevant feedback, or to amplify it with target audiences of potential visitors, funders and stakeholders. Making better use of positive visitor feedback in our marketing, our fundraising and our programming will allow us to build considerable cultural capital to emphasise the relevance and importance of Amgueddfa Cymru to Wales. Further advice on the procurement of a CRM system will be provided in the Digital Experience Action Plan. We will need to assess business use and procurement of an appropriate, bilingual CRM system, which will be taken corporately.

**A technology solution alone will not address the issues mentioned above.** It is

recommended that the Visitor Experience Group, along with senior managers and site heads, develop a simple workflow and supporting governance that will enable us to increase our corporate knowledge around customer relations and data literacy, providing a simple, central point of reference for visitor feedback that is accessible to all relevant parties.

There is also considerable work to be done on challenging our organizational attitudes to feedback. Even when our approval rating is at 95% excellent, there seems to be **disproportionate interest and investment in appeasing the 5%, rather than in developing our relationships with the 95%**, and missing opportunities to cultivate donors, advocates, volunteers and repeat visitors.

The absence of a simple corporate complaints procedure has also led to confusion over what is proportionate when dealing with negative feedback. Anecdotal instances raised during consultation suggest a trend of disproportionately escalating complaints, sometimes even to executive level, missing opportunities to mitigate and de-escalate complaints at first point of contact. In addition to a simplified complaints procedure, we need to take steps to **build professional resilience and confidence in staff responsible for receiving and responding to complaints**, hand in hand with developing better ways for positive feedback to take root throughout the organization.

A further, unexplored source of potential for visitor rating is 'check ins' on social media, as well as geo-tagged user-generated content. For example, St Fagans is tagged as a location in thousands of compelling, user-generated photos, which communicate the **real diversity of our visitors, and the genuine enjoyment they experience at the museum**<sup>5</sup>. There is a lot to be learned from exploring what our visitors are doing at our museums, and saying about our museums, when we're not around to set an agenda or actively seek their views. The potential of user-generated content as a source of data on visitor experience will be further explored in the Digital Experience Action Plan that is being developed as part of this strategy. The Digital Experience Action Plan will also explore how we improve visitor interactivity and engagement across different areas of the visitor experience.

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<sup>5</sup> [Instagram Geolocated Content](#), January 2018

### 3.3 Our Visitor Experience Priorities

When asked what makes the most significant contribution to Visitor Experience at our museums (fig. 2), staff rated factors such as staff knowledge and ‘welcome’. However when asked about their own priorities when visiting other museums and attractions, they cited more practical concerns, such as orientation, cost and cleanliness, with an emphasis on ambience and staff attitudes, rather than knowledge.

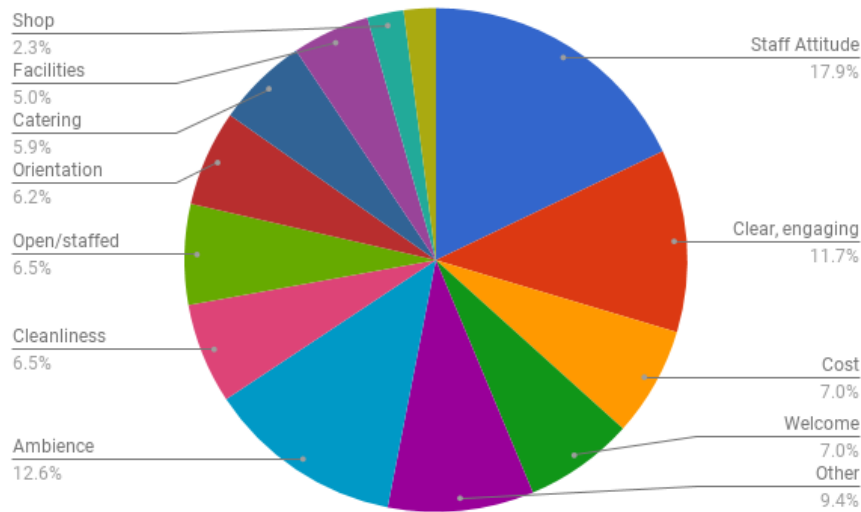


Figure 8: What we value when we are visitors. ‘When I visit museums and attractions in my own time, I notice...’  
 (Staff Consultation, 257 responses)

This points to a slight tendency to overlook the practical needs of our own visitors. Therefore it is recommended that in implementing this strategy the Visitor Experience Group, in conjunction with senior managers and site heads, work to fulfil these practical needs as a matter of priority. With regards to those practical needs, visitors were surveyed on factors that would improve their experience at our museums:

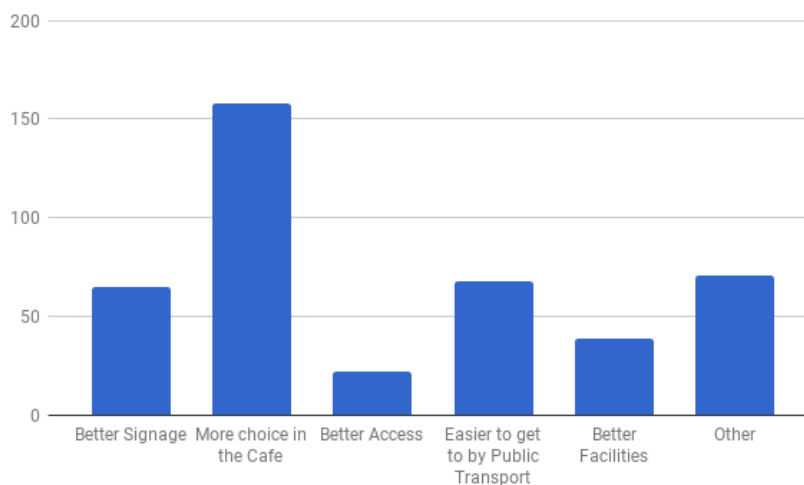


Figure 9: ‘Which of the following would have made your visit more enjoyable?’ Visitor Survey, 423 Responses

When asked what we could do better, 37% of visitors surveyed noted that more choice in the cafe would make their visit more enjoyable, with a healthy response to providing better access by public transport, better signage, access and facilities. Our catering offer is analysed in detail in the Thurley Review and this strategy takes its lead from the recommendations therein.

These survey responses point to a need to implement a '**back to basics**' approach to improving Visitor Experience ensuring our sites are accessible, easily navigable, comfortable and engaging.

Over the last five years we have been developing ways of improving interactivity (both physical and digital) and improving staff interaction with visitors. Of those visitors we surveyed, 67% reported that they wanted to interact with staff when they had specific questions to ask or as part of a planned activity such as a tour or interpretative demonstration, and they also wanted to be able to shape their own visit. This is an area of research analysis and benchmarking that we need to extend and we will take forward through the action plan.

Key to improving the visitor experience is focusing on skills development of visitor-facing staff. For example, customer service training to improve communication skills and to embed good practice in engaging with visitors about the museum and their visit, as well as cross- and up-selling – directing visitors to tours, guidebooks, events, products or digital resources that might enhance their experience and engagement, and increase our income generation.

### **3.4 Recommendations: Improving Visitor Experience**

The overall responsibility for implementing this strategy rests with Visitor Experience Group, who will be answerable to the Senior Management Team and our Trustees. The success of this strategy will depend on colleagues' readiness to work together across departments and museums, employing a variety of appropriate working methods such as PRINCE2 project management, action research, piloting and mainstreaming, evaluation and formal and informal training.

As mentioned in Section 3.1, we currently provide a generally excellent Visitor Experience, according to a variety of sources. When surveyed on the ease with which they could navigate, engage with and enjoy our museums, visitors identified practical areas where we could be making specific improvements:

- 11% of visitors reported that finding their way around using museum maps and signage was Very Difficult or Somewhat Difficult.
- 14% reported that finding out about things to do on the day was Very Difficult or Somewhat Difficult.
- 13% reported that making a purchase was Very Difficult or Somewhat Difficult.

Staff consultation raised the issue that, in some cases, outdated brown signs do not accurately reflect the name or logo of the museum. The negative impact of incorrect signage may well have been mitigated by the recent uptake in GPS mapping apps and improved mobile connectivity, as only 5% reported that finding their way to the museum was Very Difficult or Somewhat Difficult.

96% of those surveyed noted that it was Easy or Very Easy to discover something interesting at our museums, and as such these recommendations are not concerned with making amendments to our core offer, and are restricted to areas in need of improvement identified in our surveys and consultations.

## 4. Aims & Objectives

Specific **Aims** and **Objectives** for implementing this strategy have been drawn directly from the consultation process outlined above.

This section includes an Action Plan which has specific recommendations that will enable us to achieve the **Objectives** outlined below.

### Aims

In implementing this strategy, participating parties must ensure that they are working to serve the following aims:

- maintain and share good practice in Visitor Experience
- improve the consistency of our Welsh and English medium visitors' experiences at all our museums
- raise awareness of Amgueddfa Cymru as a trusted, quality brand
- increase our capacity to generate income.

### Objectives

In order to fulfil the aims of this strategy, the Visitor Experience Group, in conjunction with senior managers and site heads, will be asked to address the following objectives:

**To develop a framework to share good customer service and provide consistency across museums:** enabling staff to share good practice across museums; creating space and incentives for continued professional development for front-line staff; celebrating excellence and challenging old habits.

**To create workflows, supporting governance and infrastructure to make better use of positive visitor feedback:** allowing us to better consolidate, leverage and celebrate the positive feedback we receive from our visitors; building a fuller, more engaging and more accurate picture of how visitors experience our museums.

**To develop and implement a world-class visitor orientation scheme:** by improving the efficiency of our decision-making spaces; maintaining our engaging participatory spaces; and providing our visitors with spaces to rest, respond and donate.

**To make it easier for visitors to find us in a crowded marketplace:** by looking at practical ways to better connect the Amgueddfa Cymru brand to the great work happening at all our museums; testing, evaluating and mainstreaming ways to make ourselves easier to understand, approach and engage with.

**To work together with NMGW Enterprises Ltd and franchisees to create a joined-up catering, hospitality and retail experience:** by putting adequate procedures in place to ensure feedback received by franchisees is heard and acted upon; creating more consistent and persuasive commercial calls to action; mainstreaming best practice in cross- and up-selling to all visitor-facing staff



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