

Closing the Circle

Dear friends and colleagues

I would like to welcome you to the Natural History Museum both on behalf of the VSG Committee and the Museum's Department for Learning. I would also like to thank you for coming and thank those colleagues that organised this event, especially Nicky Boyd, Kate Pontin & Francoise McClafferty from the VSG and Georgina Bishop & Andy Lee from NHM.

My colleagues and I feel particularly happy to host this event, as the Department for Learning alongside Marketing is a strong champion of evaluation within our Museum.

A recent study indicated that the Museum's current system in visitor studies consists of individual stakeholders in marketing, customer services and learning undertaking or commissioning visitor research or evaluation work. This type of work included:

- Visitor profiling surveys (a sample of approx 7,000 visitors per)
- Alva Mystery Shoppers
- Exhibition evaluations (approx 11 in the last 5 years)
- Qualitative studies in visitor behaviour (3 in the last 5 years)
- Consultation with Black and Ethnic Minorities

I could safely say that over 20 reports are generated per year to

- Measure visitor changes
- Inform strategy

What happens to those reports and how much do we know about our visitors?

I am not going to say that the reports are shelved and forgotten as they are used, however mainly (if not uniquely) by the people that commissioned them.

There are gaps...not only in our knowledge of our visitors but more critically there are gaps in our interpretation and use of the data. As an organisation we are aware that we need a wide intelligence function to aggregate and interpret data, to relate findings to levels of product investment, to inform product development and to support management information needs. We need to transform the data into useful institutional knowledge.

In the same study, it was identified that the Museum has four long-term aims:

- To develop an organisation-wide integrated system of data gathering, interpretation and dissemination.

- To develop a framework for visitor research that both informs and responds to planning and management functions within the Museum.
- To produce reliable, robust and complementary data sets to a consistent professional standard And hopefully
- To build an external reputation as a leader in the field of visitor research and intelligence

We still have a long way before we reach our goals and we are keen to learn from colleagues that work in other institutions.

Today we are fortunate to have with us and learn from Catherine Halcrow, Head of Interpretation, London Zoo Alison James, Museum Consultant, and Jack Ashby, Acting Manager, Grant Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy. They will share with us their experiences in visitor studies and will present how evaluation has impacted on interpretation.

G-Gina Koutsika
Learning & Audience Advocate
Natural History Museum