

Learning Policy 2007

Summary

Learning is at the heart of the Horniman Museum and Gardens. As such, this policy informs all activities across the organisation and is not restricted to the Learning Department. Therefore learning considerations should be given due weight in all areas of Museum decision-making.

This document introduces the framework within which the policy operates then details our learning mission and what our audiences can expect from our learning services.

This Policy supports the Horniman Corporate Plan and should be read in conjunction with the Museum's Access, Equal Opportunities and Customer Care Policies.

Introduction

The Trustees of the Horniman see the principle activity of the Trust as:

'The provision of a public, educational museum and gardens to encourage a wider appreciation of the world, its peoples and their cultures, and its environments'

(Trustees report March 1998:3)

This statement establishes education as central to the Horniman mission and reflects Fredrick Horniman's original vision for his Museum and Gardens – that they were a free gift to the people of London for their 'recreation, instruction and enjoyment'.

The Museum's Association's definition of a museum also emphasises the central role of education and the importance of collection development, stewardship and research.

'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.'

(Museums Association AGM 1998)

Our Learning Mission

We aim to establish connections between all our audiences and collections in the museum, gardens and aquarium, thereby enabling visitors to create their own frameworks for learning. We aim to motivate and inspire our visitors to build on these frameworks beyond their visit and give them the skills and confidence to do so.

The Horniman Museum and Gardens uses the term 'learning' in its broadest sense and values all kinds of informal learning activities, as well as formal education. As a result we

adopt the following definition of learning from the Campaign for Learning and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

'Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve the development or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness, values, ideas and feelings, or an increase in the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more.'

What audiences can expect from the Horniman learning services

The Horniman Trust is committed to serving the needs and exceeding the expectations of existing and potential audiences. This is achieved through a broad range of programmes and services based on the collections and drawing on the expertise of staff within the organisation. Visitors can therefore expect us to adhere to the following principles.

Learning principles

- Experiences will be stimulating, enjoyable, relevant and appropriate for the visitor, setting museum objects in a contemporary framework, thereby motivating visitors to learn.
- Programmes will maximize the potential of the museum, gardens and aquarium as unique learning environments and explore the many stories and interpretations that they offer in a way that is relevant to our audiences.
- Programmes will recognise that people learn in different ways and have different strengths and interests, so multiple ways of exploring are always provided with a great variety of activities.
- Learning will be built onto the framework of visitors' existing knowledge. Interdisciplinary approaches will be used to aid this process as they tap into a range of existing experiences and create new links and understanding.
- Opportunities for intellectual progression will be provided where possible to ensure visitors are challenged, stimulated and can develop. When this is not possible partnerships will be developed with other learning providers allowing us to 'signpost' visitors to other developmental opportunities.
- We will evaluate the impact of our learning services and always seek ways in which to improve.

Access Principles

- Services will meet the needs of lifelong learners and strive towards access for all, regardless of age, sex, social status, ethnic origin or ability.
- Services will reflect the diversity of cultures locally and globally. They should increase inter-cultural respect, whilst challenging discrimination, inequality and racism.
- We are committed to consultation with existing and potential audiences in order to develop appropriate and attractive learning experiences.
- We will encourage self-representation by the community and recognise that this engenders respect, trust and empowerment in these groups, other visitors and museum staff.
- The museum will provide a forum for debate where differing perspectives can be explored, preconceptions challenged and critical thinking developed – within a framework where visitors’ physical, emotional and intellectual needs are met.

Management Principles

- We will adopt a reflective practice by examining our own, and others, perspectives on our purpose and processes and use this in future planning.
- We will advocate environmentally sustainable behavior to visitors and museum staff through learning programmes in the museum and gardens and contribute to sustainable practices within our operations.
- We will keep abreast of developments in the wider world, which can improve Museum practice.
- We will deliver high quality services consistently and at value for money.