

## **Museum Essentials: Working with the Learning and Engagement Manifesto - Transcriptions**

### **David Anderson: The Journey So Far**

The beginning of the project was really a discussion between myself and Sharon Heal about the Common Wealth Report which I was the author of about twenty-odd years ago and the fact that there had never been a successor report. The Common Wealth Report was the outcome of a sense of imbalance certainly for me that was the case I was a museum educator at the time it was written.

It seemed very clear to me that the educational function of museums was regarded as marginal both in terms of resourcing and museum purpose which in those days was a much more traditionally collections-focused purpose without a great deal of reference to the society around museums as the justification. This was heavily at odds with the way in which much of the rest of society looked at museums. Really the report was an attempt to argue the case for education, learning being a whole museum responsibility.

So in thinking about how this then relates to the Manifesto for Learning and Engagement I would argue that again it's come at a time when there is an imbalance between the way museums are operating and the needs of the society around us. Inequality is much more evidently damaging even than it was in the 1990s. The issues of Black Lives Matter and the legacies of empire are much more sharply debated than they were even then and the sense of society being divided and the museum sector being divided is much sharper. And that question of - "is learning and engagement for the whole of the museum or is it the job of the educators in the basement?" still remains unresolved in principle in very very many museums in the United Kingdom and that divides us. It's a division - that distinction I do not accept and this Manifesto does not accept so this is actually a very radical document.

Rather like the first report a lot of consultation was done across all four Nations of the United Kingdom and that meant that we got a whole diversity of views about what the issues were with learning and engagement in museums and the issues which not just educators faced on the ground but also maybe directors and other staff who were keen to support the learning function. And all of that came together

in a sort of collective debate really which then was distilled down into a very short and sharp document.

It doesn't attempt to persuade purely by research. It is laying out an ethical case, in a few pages, for change. You don't have to spend more than fifteen minutes reading the Manifesto you will understand all of the key points in that time. But it's utterly unequivocal in saying this is the responsibility of the sector this is what we must do.

The Common Wealth Report was first published in 1997. There were no devolved governments at that stage. One of the earliest and most important debates that we had was can we actually do a report that covers the four Nations? The format of the Manifesto - which is very very much about principles - is I believe a very elegant solution and I do understand that the Manifesto already has been picked up in other countries as well.

A museum does not have to be just a building where collections are stored. A museum more importantly is a way of thinking and you can take that way of thinking anywhere you can use it with any object in the community around you. So for me there is a liberation in the Manifesto in that it doesn't require you to actually own a big building with lots of stuff in it. And that gives me hope. It gives me hope that museums can change as well as society can change and for me that's the reason why we need a Manifesto not a big long report.