



Association of
Independent
Museums

AIM Bulletin

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Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

www.aim-museums.co.uk

Weathering the storm

I'm writing this piece sat working from home, witnessing the latest storm to wreak havoc across the country. Yesterday, our team at Beamish Museum worked tirelessly to prepare our open-air site to brace itself for Storm Eowyn to arrive. Carrying out tree checks, securing our buildings and having emergency closure discussions unfortunately now seem to be a regular occurrence.

It's increasingly apparent that severe weather events are becoming more frequent and intense, putting cultural organisations in a very challenging position. These institutions, which house valuable collections and serve as vital community hubs for many, regularly find themselves being forced to close temporarily due to adverse weather conditions. The decision to close a museum is never one that is taken lightly; while the safety of staff, volunteers and visitors is the number one priority, the financial implications can be significant and often bring complex and difficult challenges for museums, big and small.

Museums depend on consistent revenue from ticket sales, events, and food and retail purchases to sustain their operations, so any deviation away from what has been planned, and budgeted for, will certainly have repercussions. A sudden closure will result in lost income, which may be difficult to recover, especially for smaller museums operating on tight budgets. This is where we, as independent museums, must galvanise our entrepreneurial spirit and think outside the box in order to make the best out of a bad situation.

Contingency plans such as remote working and participating in essential online learning are just some of the ways that independent museums have ensured that they can continue to operate when closed and maximise the staff already rostered in. Nevertheless, there can still be a ripple effect, as budgets are adjusted, programming is scaled back, or planned exhibitions delayed to deal with the aftermath of a storm and the subsequent closure.

Writing this is somewhat reminiscent of the new ways of thinking and the new approaches that were required during the pandemic when museums had to close unexpectedly. It forced us to think creatively about how to engage with our audiences who couldn't visit in person, and how to diversify our income streams from conventional means. Independent museums and heritage organisations are often credited for their uniqueness and their ability to adapt and prosper in the face of adversity. Despite the obvious negatives which come with unexpected closures, it is a good opportunity for us to revisit that true meaning of being independent, and to ensure we are protecting our organisations for generations to come.

Museums proved during COVID, and are still proving now, that our resilience and adaptability will enable us to weather the storm, both literally and figuratively.

Emily Frankish
Visitor Experience Manager, Beamish
and AIM Trustee



Front cover

Bluebird K7 at The Ruskin Museum. The Ruskin Museum is a small independent museum based in Coniston, Cumbria, nestled under the beautiful backdrop of the Yewdale Fells. It was opened in 1901 by W.G Collingwood in memory of John Ruskin, the Victorian polymath who lived in Coniston from 1872 until his death in 1900. Originally set up to display Ruskin's watercolours, drawings and minerals of geological importance, over the years the collection has grown and the Museum has been extended twice. See our profile on page 19 for more.



Arts Everywhere Fund announced

Support worth over £270 million announced for arts venues, museums, libraries and the heritage sector.

Hundreds of arts venues, museums, libraries and heritage buildings will receive a share of more than £270 million as part of an Arts Everywhere Fund, the government recently announced. At the time of going to press AIM was seeking further detail on the announcement, which includes

- A fifth round of the Museum Estate and Development Fund worth £25 million
- A new £20 million Museum Renewal Fund offering much-needed support to civic museums
- An additional £120 million to continue the Public Bodies Infrastructure Fund
- An additional £15 million for Heritage at Risk
- A new £4.85 million Heritage Revival Fund
- A 5% increase to national museums and galleries budgets
- Confirmation that DCMS will be providing £3.2 million in funding through the Museums and Schools Programme, the Heritage Schools Programme, the Art & Design National Saturday Club and the BFI Film Academy.

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said

“Arts and culture help us understand the world we live in, they shape and define society and are enjoyed by people in every part of our country. They are the building blocks of our world-leading creative industries and make a huge contribution towards boosting growth and breaking down

barriers to opportunities for young people to learn the creative skills they need to succeed.

The funding will allow the arts to continue to flourish across Britain, creating good jobs and growth by fixing the foundations in our cultural venues, museums, libraries and heritage institutions.”

AIM Director Lisa Ollerhead said

“We very much welcome this significant investment. It is fantastic news for the sector, not least given the pressure the public purse is under.

It also underlines the important role museums and heritage organisations play in strengthening our communities, boosting our economy and providing strong foundations for our creative industries.”

MEND latest

The beneficiaries of the fourth round of the Museum Estate and Development Fund were also announced with 29 local museums receiving a share of almost £25 million to upgrade their buildings. They included AIM members Fusilier Museum, Bury; The Weardale Museum; and The Museum of North Craven Life. The announcements followed ten projects across the UK being informed they are to receive a total of £67 million including the National Railway Museum in York, the International Slavery Museum and Maritime Museum in Liverpool, and, in Leeds, both the National Poetry Centre and the revamping of ‘Temple Works’, paving the way for it to house the British Library North.

Subscribe to AIM’s weekly e-news for all the latest on sector funding.



Ahoy there!

Getting ship-shape for conference

Social events and first keynote announced for AIM's National Conference 2025.

Social events are a big part of what makes AIM conference a success and contribute significantly to its reputation as one of the friendliest conferences in the sector. As we gear up for a few fantastic days in Portsmouth for *Museums in Motion: Building resilience for a changing world* we're pleased to share details of our social events and first keynote.

This year, we're taking full advantage of the wonderful maritime setting of Portsmouth Historic Quarter, home to both the Mary Rose Museum and the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

HMS Warrior

On the Tuesday, the evening before Conference begins, we'll enjoy an informal networking event and delegate

meet-up before the conference starts in earnest.

Join us aboard HMS Warrior after hours for a drink and canapes on the deck (weather dependent) plus tours of the ship. Experience the golden age of steam aboard this crown jewel of the Victorian Navy. Transport yourself

back in time, to the heyday of the Royal Navy as you explore this genuine icon, reimagined exactly as she was in 1863, and still fully afloat some 150 years later.

Dive in

Our Wednesday evening social provides a unique way to experience our Host





Lucy Powrie.

Venue Sponsors Mary Rose Museum. Enjoy a walking buffet with each course served at a different point around this fascinating museum. There will also be a free drink served on arrival.

We'll dive into the untold story of the finding, excavation, and recovery of the *Mary Rose*. You'll be surrounded by the fascinating story of Henry VIII's warship and those who served on her, told through the many original objects recovered from the seabed, this promises to be an engaging and atmospheric evening.

First keynote speaker announced

We're also pleased to announce our first keynote speaker, Lucy Powrie. At 25, Lucy is the Brontë Society's youngest ever Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Author of *The Paper & Hearts Society* series published by Hodder Children's Books, Lucy is the award-winning book content creator known as *lucythereader* and her popular YouTube channel has attracted 2.4m views. She has over

ten years' experience in founding and curating online communities. Passionate about neurodivergent inclusion and engaging with young audiences in the arts and heritage sector, we're delighted to have her join us in Portsmouth.



News in brief

Cats in Cartoons

The Cartoon Museum is collecting the greatest cats to grace British comics, newspapers and magazines to explore why people love cats so much and what cats tell us about life. The exhibition includes works by significant and well-known artists such as Louis Wain, Axel Scheffler, Ronald Searle, William Heath Robinson, Simon Tofield, Anthony Smith, Gemma Correll, and Hunt Emerson, and favourite characters including Garfield and Bagpuss. It also explores the work of Battersea Dogs

and Cats Home does to protect and advocate for the welfare of cats, as well as highlighting how visitors can get involved in caring for cats themselves.

5 April – September 2025

www.cartoonmuseum.org

Tank museum rated top-ten

The Tank Museum in Bovington, Dorset, achieved a rating of 99% in a recent Mystery Visitor Benchmarking survey, placing it in the top ten

attractions for visitor experience in the UK. Around 160 UK visitor attractions were assessed through mystery visits in 2024 by market researcher BVA BDRC. The visitor journey, including pre-visit information, core visit experience, gift shop, catering and facilities was evaluated alongside staff performance, sustainability, cleanliness and navigation.



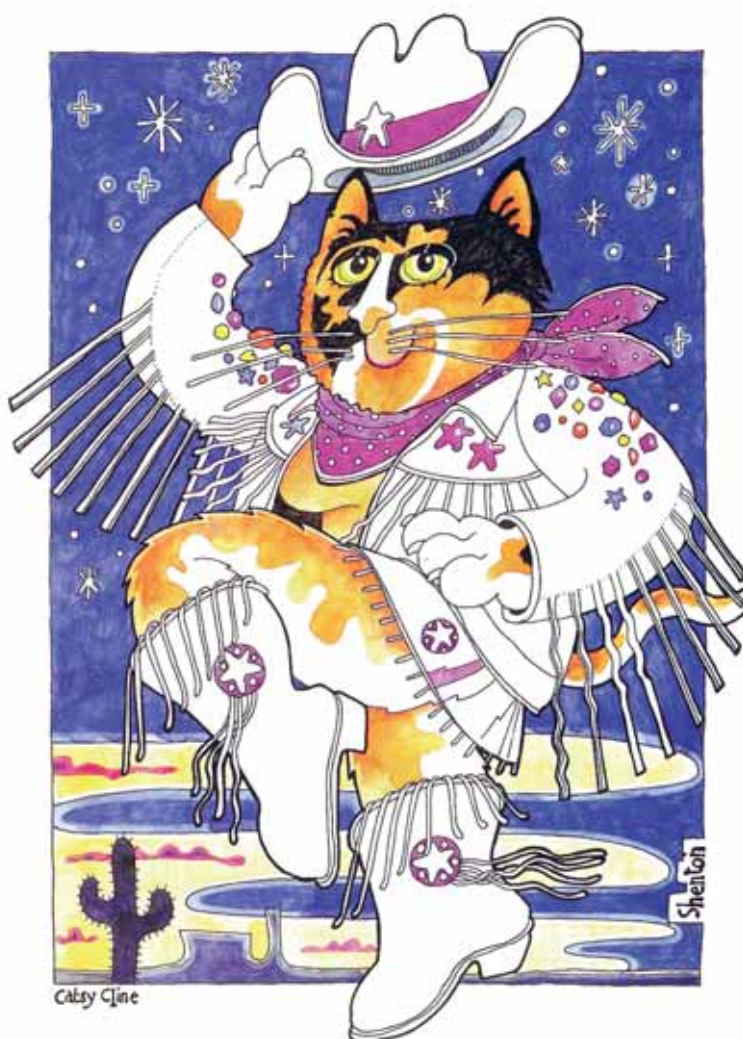
With an overall rating of 99%, The Tank Museum received the second highest score, against prestigious attractions including Shakespeare's Birthplace, The Deep aquarium in Hull, and Loch Ness Cruises by Jacobite.

tankmuseum.org

UK-first bronze sculpture makes history in Nottingham's Broad Marsh Green Heart

A new addition to Nottingham's city centre has been unveiled at Nottingham's Green Heart in Broad Marsh. The first example of civic art of its kind in the UK, *Standing In This Place* is the work of sculptor Rachel Carter and community history group The Legacy Makers. It depicts two women in period costume – an enslaved Black woman working in the American cotton fields and a white woman working in the East Midlands's textile mills.

Standing In This Place makes history as the UK's first sculpture to recognise this transatlantic story, as well as addressing the imbalance that less



Catsy Cline by David Shenton.



than 5% of Britain's sculptures portray non-royal women, and even fewer are women of colour.

Nottingham became globally recognised for its lace production in the 1800s, which helped to shape the landscape and culture of the city today. The National Justice Museum will be the custodians of this new bronze sculpture which is the first piece of public art it has acquired.

www.standinginthisplace.co.uk

National Motor Museum engineers complete engine rebuild in Sunbeam 1000hp restoration milestone

In a landmark stage of the Sunbeam 1000hp restoration, National Motor Museum engineers have almost completed the rebuild of its rear engine after years of work to strip,



Ian Stanfield with the crankshaft in the workshop.

clean and restore it. Sunbeam had only run for 300 yards (274m) before being packed into a crate to be taken to Daytona for its Land Speed Record-breaking run in 1927. Engineers have had to take apart and restore each part of the colossal 22.5 litre Matabele V12 aero engine to enable it to work again. The workshop team has relied on experience and knowledge, with no manual or documentation to help with the Sunbeam engine rebuild.

See video footage of the rebuild at <https://youtu.be/p4ohsLb1z-U>

nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/sunbeam-1000hp-restoration-campaign

£456K boost for nine Scottish museums

Museums Galleries Scotland has awarded nine grants to museums through the Museum Development Fund. Each initiative aims to strengthen the relationship between museums and local communities, whether through participatory practices, inclusive programming, or enhancing access to cultural heritage.

The awarded projects include

National Museums Scotland

National Museums Scotland received £60,000 to support the next phase of

its Reveal and Connect project, which aims to develop community-led research around South African collections.

University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh has received £58,469 to develop and embed the University's Heritage Collections learning programme in Scottish prisons.

Royal Scottish Academy

Royal Scottish Academy has received £59,514 to support their Partners Across Scotland project as part of their 200th Anniversary programme in 2026.

Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

Surgeons' Hall Museum has received £43,932 to support 'A Fair Field and No Favour', a transformative project designed to explore and highlight the historical and current barriers women face in the field of surgery.

The Scottish Crannog Centre

The museum has received £58,367 to develop a new display for its 2,500-year-old ceramic and textile collections.

Robert Burns Ellisland Museum and Farm

The museum has received £60,000 to help diversify and expand the museum's audiences, provide inclusive opportunities for young people, and make the site more accessible to visitors.

Dundee Museum of Transport

Dundee Museum of Transport has received £58,604 to employ a freelance curator to support the museum's move to a new premises at Maryfield Tram Depot in 2026.

Almond Valley Heritage Trust

Almond Valley Heritage Centre has received £32,000 to reintegrate the Museum of the Scottish Shale Oil Industry into the wider Almond Valley Heritage Centre experience.

West Dunbartonshire Council

The council's museum service has received £25,535 to support their project, Connecting Clydebank, Communities and Culture.

New AIM Board developments

Angela Spreadbury nominated to join the AIM Board.

Following an open recruitment process seeking Trustee candidates with significant financial experience, AIM is seeking to appoint Angela Spreadbury to join the Board.

Working latterly as Director of Finance and Resources for SS Great Britain, Angela started her training as a Management Accountant (CIMA) with a reinsurance business before going on to work as an accountant in the manufacturing, financial services, startup business and charity sectors.

Her interest in museums is a key driver

behind her application, as Angela explains.

“As a keen visitor to museums in both the UK and Europe I am very excited to be joining the AIM Board. Working in a variety of sectors has given me a rounded experience as an accountant.

I moved into the charity sector after completing a psychology degree as a mature student, using the knowledge gained in my degree to expand my portfolio of responsibility to include HR and volunteer management. I have had responsibility for these areas, along with finance and governance, for the last 16 years at senior management level and am passionate about ensuring that all the resources a charity has are fully utilised to maximise return on investment.”



Angela Spreadbury

Angela's nomination will be put forward as part of the AGM at Conference in June.

AIM Board puts two forward for co-deputy chair roles

AIM Board members Nathaniel Hepburn and Alexander Ratcliffe have recently been nominated to the roles of co-deputy chair.

The popularity of co-roles in many organisations highlights an increasing shift toward shared leadership, perhaps acknowledging the complexity of contemporary organisational challenges and how diverse viewpoints can be effective in tackling them.

We spoke to Alexander Ratcliffe for his views on how he might navigate the dynamics of shared leadership.

“We first discussed with the Chair what her strategic priorities were for the coming months – not least because she would be absent for an extended period of time due to medical leave a week after our appointment! This grounded us as co-chairs and gave us a sense of what would be expected when she returned. Secondly, we discussed what our own perspectives and priorities were and identified common ground – and importantly where we had different views or capabilities. When meeting with the Director we agreed that one of us would generally lead, considering and then summarising feedback or steers from the other secured in advance. This helps to reduce conflict or confusion by providing a ‘single voice’. It requires trust and clear communication between you both. One of you has to learn to step back as the other steps forward.”

From your perspective, what are the unique advantages of being a ‘co-’?

Resilience and diversity of thought. We both have full time day jobs outside of AIM so it is important that we can share meetings and work to reduce the burden and ensure that between us we can provide AIM with the support and direction it needs. We also have different experiences and backgrounds professionally, which helps to not only identify the issues or tasks that may better fall to one of us over the other, but it also helps to balance our advice and steers. We can test whether our approach and decisions are proportionate and make sense to each other.

For those considering stepping into a co-leadership role, what advice would you offer to help them build a strong, productive partnership?

Get to know your co-chair. You must get a sense of how you are going to work together and how you will establish and maintain clear lines of communication. Getting to know them a bit outside of the Boardroom to understand more about who they are, their background and perspective, and any constraints or considerations on working pattern will pay massive dividends.

Briefing or downloading to your co-chair after important meetings or discussions held solo helps to keep you both on the same page, and avoids divergence of views or confusion. We are only starting out on this journey so we are by no means experts, but we will try to learn from the experience and from each other to help us be effective leaders.

Clare Mills, Deputy CEO, on the very latest from the Charity Finance Group.

Do you know your SORP from your SOFA?

As we head into spring, one thing is dominating the charity finance agenda – the final consultation on the changes to the Charities SORP, or Statement of Recommended Practice. If you are not familiar with the SORP, your finance people will be. The SORP sets out the reporting requirements for your organisation's finances, including how to present your SOFA, or Statement of Financial Activities.

The Charities SORP applies to all organisations with annual income of £250,000 or more. It was last amended in 2019 and we have been waiting for the next set of changes for some time. We now expect the final draft to be shared with the public for consultation between April and June.

The SORP Making Body comprises the Charity Commission for England and Wales, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and the Charities Institute Ireland, and they will look at all the feedback received during the consultation. The final, final draft will then need to be signed off by the Financial Reporting Council (FRS) before being published in October 2025 (latest estimate) and coming into effect from 1 January 2026.

So, what do charities need to do about the SORP?

First, CFG is holding a series of consultation sessions to capture practitioners' thoughts on the proposed changes. We want to hear what you think and how the changes will

affect your organisation, for better or for worse, and we'd love you to join one of our four online roundtables. To find out more, head to CFG's website: bit.ly/SORPconsult or scan the QR code below.

“ The Charities SORP applies to all organisations with annual income of £250,000 or more. ”

Second, the implementation of the changes will be retrospective, so if your year end is, for example, 31 March 2026, then your accounts will need to be prepared in line with the updated SORP. This means transactions from 1 April 2025 will all need to be treated in line with the changes.

CFG will be running training events for our networks and the wider charitable sector in the autumn, which we hope you will be able to make use of. As AIM members, your organisation can join CFG at no extra charge and make use of all our member benefits including our online Knowledge Hub, and discounts on our training programmes and events. We also facilitate a thriving Arts and Museums Special Interest Group which meets regularly online to share best practice, provide peer support and open up discussion.



Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) Skills Development Manager Natalie Milor highlights the organisation's efforts to address skills gaps in the sector through their Modern Apprenticeship programme.

Empowering Scotland's museums and galleries workforce:

A pathway through Modern Apprenticeships

Ensuring that Scotland's museums and galleries workforce 'has equal access to skills development opportunities and is empowered to operate ambitiously' is a key aim of *Scotland's Museums and Galleries Strategy*. Offering three types of Modern Apprenticeships is one of the ways we, at MGS, are delivering on this promise.

The 2024 *Survey of Scotland's Museums and Galleries* commissioned by MGS highlighted

the growing financial pressures on the sector as well as the decline in various roles such as learning and engagement, curation, and management. The MGS apprenticeship programme is designed to address and fill these skills gaps in the sector.

Our **Digital Marketing, Museums and Galleries Technician, and Management Modern Apprenticeships**

allow individuals based in Scotland to gain an industry-recognised vocational qualification while they work.

The apprenticeships are fully funded by Skills Development Scotland, meaning there is no cost to either the apprentices or employers. While apprentices need to be over the age of 16, there is no upper age limit. These vocational qualifications can be adapted to all learning needs,

Inspiring museum engagement, enabling communities

Our Headline Conference 2025 sponsor Bloomberg Connects on how they support independent museums.

We live in a day and age where digital trends continue to evolve at pace. For independent museums, staying connected to visitors and peers is both a challenge and an opportunity. Bloomberg Connects aims to make this connection easier. Along with being a free digital platform, it's a tool for professional development, audience engagement, and collaboration within the cultural sector.

A free digital guide with benefits: Bloomberg Connects provides museums with a free, user-friendly digital guide available via an app or on our newly launched mobile browser. We endeavour to address needs beyond just visitor engagement—it's about equipping museums with the tools and skills they need to thrive. Our platform offers comprehensive training to support digital, interpretive, and marketing skills, ensuring partners can maximise their use of the guide while strengthening their overall outreach and impact. Additionally, Bloomberg Connects provides marketing and signage support to help drive awareness and engagement.

Investing in professional development: Beyond offering a digital platform, Bloomberg Connects is committed to

styles, and preferences and unlike many traditional academic routes, there are no requirements for pre-existing qualifications. By their very nature, the apprenticeships open new, more accessible, entry routes into the cultural heritage sector.

The **Digital Marketing Modern Apprenticeship** allows entry level digital marketing professionals to upskill in specialist areas including the legal, regulatory, and ethical requirements of their job as well as email marketing, editing, and building websites. Supported by their employer and MGS assessor, their skills enhance what their organisation can deliver and allow the apprentice to increase their expertise and employability.

The **Museums and Galleries Technician Modern Apprenticeship** is suitable for anyone working in a museum, who does not have a Master's degree. From visitor services to conservation technician, curatorial and public programming staff, the qualification allows apprentices to refine their existing skills, elevating them to a new level of professionalism. At the same time, apprentices can develop skills in new areas to help them achieve their long-term goals and career aspirations. Organisations, visitors, and the collections all benefit immeasurably from the projects the apprentices deliver as part of the programme. Apprentices bring fresh eyes and energy to help their

organisations tackle problems and take advantage of new opportunities, all while following best practices.

Appropriate for line managers, assistant managers and senior managers, the **Management Modern Apprenticeship** is a qualification jointly awarded with the Chartered Management Institute (CMI). Through this apprenticeship, participants keep their knowledge of their organisation's health, safety, and security policies current while ensuring they facilitate a productive and fair working environment. They work with their MGS assessor while developing operational plans, managing resources, budgets, and their staff members' performance. Working to consistently demonstrate professional and ethical practices means that everyone who works closely with a Management Modern Apprentice will feel the benefit of them undertaking the qualification.

Management Modern Apprentice Demi Boyd, Exhibitions & Collections Keeper at the Scottish Football Museum said:

"I'm really enjoying the Management Modern Apprenticeship . . . [I have] developed existing and new skills, and I've gained confidence in myself . . . I think in completing this qualification, I will feel confident in my leadership skills and realise the value I add to my organisation."

In addition to support from their expert assessors, participants in the MGS



Skills Development Manager Natalie Milor at the recent MGS Symposium.

apprenticeship programme can benefit from being matched and working closely with a mentor with relevant sector experience.

MGS have several places available for the Digital Marketing, Museums and Galleries Technician and Management Modern Apprenticeships for the 2025/2026 financial year. If you work for a Scottish museum, gallery, archive or library, and think you could benefit from this life changing opportunity, or you would like to discuss the value of modern apprentices in the museum sector further, please contact NatalieM@museumsgalleries.scotland.org.uk.

www.museumsgalleries.scotland.org.uk/training-programmes/modern-apprenticeships

advancing professional development within the museum sector. We provide training sessions covering topics such as Visitor Experience, Audio Production, and Marketing, along with hands-on guidance on leveraging our platform effectively. The Bloomberg Connects team hosts regular webinars and training calls where you can learn best practices, access helpful hints and essential how-to guides. Partners also receive free audio kits, and dedicated content strategists and relationship managers offer personalised support to ensure each museum makes the most of the resources available.

We recognise the importance of peer-to-peer learning and collaboration, which is why we facilitate partner convenings, virtual communities, and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) that bring together museum staff and volunteers with shared interests. UK-based gatherings and discussion forums – like our Slack channel and critique rooms – help foster knowledge-sharing, networking, and mutual support within the cultural community.

A philanthropic commitment to the Arts: Bloomberg Connects is a philanthropic initiative of Bloomberg

Philanthropies, a global organisation dedicated to improving lives through arts, education, the environment, government innovation, and public health. The platform was developed to support arts organisations in navigating the evolving digital landscape—without imposing additional financial strain on already limited budgets.

Our mission is to amplify the voices of cultural institutions and make their content widely accessible, ensuring that arts and culture can reach and inspire more people. Product updates and new features are shaped by ongoing conversations with our partners, making Bloomberg Connects a truly collaborative effort.

Join the community For independent museums looking to enhance visitor engagement, develop professional skills, and connect with a like-minded community, Bloomberg Connects offers a unique and valuable opportunity. We invite you to explore the platform, take advantage of the resources, and become part of a network that supports growth, innovation, and accessibility in the arts.

Learn more about joining Bloomberg Connects at www.bloombergconnects.org/for-partners



Adding value as a shadow trustee

Dillon Patel and Ellie Hart share their experience of being shadow trustees at Brighton and Hove Museums Trust.

What is the role of a shadow trustee?

Dillon – Unlike normal positions on the board, a shadow trustee does everything that a normal trustee member would do, except for the voting rights. They sit on the board, they provide scrutiny, they provide challenge, they read all the papers, they provide ideas. I think it's a benefit to the Senior Leadership Team, so they get new and fresh ideas. But also, it's a way for young people to break into the heritage sector, which can be very difficult.

How did you get involved with the museum?

Ellie – I saw the shadow trustee role on LinkedIn, and although I had an interest in becoming a trustee, I hadn't

necessarily thought about what sector that would be in. But as I read the job description, I thought it was really interesting, because I work in arts and had visited the museums as an audience member, and there's a lot of cross-over with arts and heritage. I also have family connections in Brighton and previously lived there.

Dillon – I studied ancient history and archaeology at university and in my early career I did a couple of stints with the British Museum and Buckinghamshire Museum. For me, it was trying to get back in touch with those roots a little bit and it seemed like an amazing way to reconnect with a fantastic range of museums while broadening my experience.

What have you gained from the experience?

Dillon – I think professionally, it's given me a lot of insight about how a board runs; the responsibility, the roles of different actors, and how that all comes together to quality assure or scrutinize the operations of an organisation. Standing on the outside, you don't realise how a successful organisation is run and how many

plates need to be kept spinning all at the same time to ensure that museums can keep their doors open.

Ellie – I've really enjoyed observing how conversations play out and how different perspectives are brought in to make decisions and to problem solve. I didn't really understand how much the board does, even though it is a free, voluntary role. And they really do scrutinize each element. I also think the support of the board to the senior leadership is crucial; it's a space for senior leadership to be able to sound out ideas and get encouragement as well as constructive challenge.

Are there any elements of the role that were unexpected?

Ellie – It has brought home how important it is to have diversity of perspective. The things that get discussed are really varied, as there are lots of different challenges that are going on for all parts of the organisation. If you don't have a board that is reflective of society and different perspectives and brings their own different life experiences, I think it would be hard to make a decision democratically that would feel reflective of the organisation.

Dillon – I think one thing that was surprising was the generosity of the board and the senior leadership team to bring us into conversations. The CEO, senior leadership team and the Chair are making a genuine effort to make sure it's a valuable experience for us, and so they can get the best out of it for the organisation.

What advice would you give other AIM members thinking about a shadow trustee programme?

Ellie – The two-year term is really good, because it takes a bit of time to find your feet, and there's only four meetings per year.

Dillon – I think everybody talks about wanting to do more in the EDI space and a lot of that is focused on external programming, but I think we do need to look internally at structure, to build in the voices of the communities that we serve. It can never be a bad idea to invite different voices into an organisation. And you don't necessarily need to have a fixed plan about what was going to work exactly. You can test something, see if it works, and if it doesn't work, iterate it.

Ellie – The key thing for me is moments for feedback on both sides. And to be matched to someone to act as a

mentor that can guide you through the meetings, which has been helpful. I think the board having a sense of something specific they'd like the shadow trustees or the young trustees to support on gives a focus, so you can feel there's an area that you're really contributing to, as well as just observing and listening.

Is there anything else you'd say to people thinking of applying for a role like this?

Ellie – I would say to people not to worry if you don't have a heritage or museum background. I think a lot of sectors cross over. Dillon and I do very different jobs, but we both bring different perspectives from our own sectors. If you're an audience member, and you go to different museums yourself, or exhibitions, you're going to bring your own perspective.

Dillon – I'd say absolutely, just go for it. A shadow trusteeship is a really valuable thing to put on your CV. It can really help create connections with other really dedicated, excellent board members, who can then flag opportunities to you as well. I've been able to learn from a really dedicated network of trustees; everyone on the board has a wealth of experience and achievements in the sector.

Have you developed skills that you can take back to your day job and help your future career?

Ellie – For me, an insight into the financial side of the organisation. I manage a programme in my day job, so I manage budgets, but I don't have oversight of a whole organisation. I've been able to get a real insight into how that's managed and spread out, and the kind of decisions that need to be made. It's given me a lot of validation for the knowledge that I have and has really helped my confidence in thinking about applying for a trustee role in the future or being a support or volunteer for another organisation.

Dillon – The main thing I take away from it is leadership. How to actually run a board, make decisions, get that buy in, and do it in a way that people feel like they have contributed. It's not a top-down approach. It's more consultative than that, and that has been interesting from my own development perspective, in terms of what kind of a leader I want to be.

Ellie – I would really stress to AIM members that this has been such a positive experience for us and for the Trust. I think more boards should be opening this up.

Listen to our latest podcast

Rosie Barnes, Curator at Staithes Museum, had mentoring support via the AIM Aspire programme not long after joining the museum last year.

We spoke to Rosie to hear just how much she's achieved following the mentoring sessions, including improving volunteer engagement and income generation, plus boosting her strategic thinking and confidence in her new role.

Rosie also shares lessons other AIM members can take from her experience, along with top tips for those members who are successful in getting support via AIM Aspire this year.

Listen to the podcast at aim-museums.co.uk/case-studies/podcast-mentoring-support-at-staithes-museum



MeThree are the team that worked with AIM to build its new website. In this industry-insights piece they share their top tips on online accessibility.

Making sure everyone can use your website

It's becoming ever more important to make sure that websites in the sector are as accessible and welcoming as your buildings and spaces. Your first thoughts might jump to checklists, compliance, and legislation, but it's really about people and improving their online experience.

According to *Euan's Guide Access Survey*, 86% of the 1 in 5 disabled people in the UK check a venue's website before visiting a new place. And if they can't get the information they need they may well abandon their plans to visit.

People who are neurodivergent (around 15% of the population) or who struggle with digital tasks (2.4 million people in the UK) will also benefit from an accessible website. In fact, accessible websites usually work better for everyone. They are often faster, easier to use and appear higher in search engine rankings.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG) are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. We wanted to make the new AIM website as inclusive as possible, and it complies with WCAG 2.2 AA (the legal requirement for public sector websites). However, most of the site meets the highest standard of WCAG 2.2 AAA. We have made specific design and coding choices to achieve this, but there are many accessibility improvements you can make that don't require any knowledge of coding or technical expertise to implement. We've listed some key best practices below. To see how accessible your site is at the moment you can use the WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools at wave.webaim.org.

Content

Use headings and subheadings

Headings provide structure to your page, breaking up the text into sections visually, which helps everyone quickly scan the content to look for particular words or phrases. To make your content more accessible, you need to use the **heading options (H1, H2, H3, etc.)** in your Content Management System (CMS), rather than simply increasing the text size or bolding the text.

Headings should be nested in a logical hierarchy:

- H1 should be the main title of the page (one per page),
- H2 subheadings should organise major sections,
- H3 and lower levels (H4, H5, H6) should be used for further subsections as needed.

Using structured headings not only helps screen reader users navigate efficiently without listening to the entire page, but it also improves your site's discoverability via search engines, which is an extra bonus!

Provide descriptive links

Rather than using vague link text like 'click here' or 'read more', use descriptive links that clearly indicate where they lead. A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself: Would the link still make sense if read out of context? This simple change helps all users navigate your site more easily, but it's especially important for people using screen readers. Screen readers often generate a list of hyperlinks from a page and read them aloud, allowing users to select the one they need. If most of the links say "click here" or "more information", the screen reader will read out:

"Link, click here. Link, more information."

That's confusing because the user has no idea which link goes where. Instead, use meaningful text like "Download the event guide" or "More details on membership benefits", making navigation faster and more accessible for everyone.

Open links in the same tab

It's best practice for links to open in the same tab or browser window. This keeps navigation predictable and prevents confusion, especially for users who may not realise a new tab has opened. If a new tab opens unexpectedly, the user can't navigate back using the back button.

Write using simple words and short sentences

WCAG guidelines recommend writing for an audience with a reading age of around 12-13 years. Using clear and concise language makes your content better for everyone, including the 7 million people in the UK with dyslexia.

Top tips for readable content

- Use short sentences and everyday words – Avoid jargon or overly complex explanations.
- Break up text with headings, bullet points, and spacing – Large blocks of text can be overwhelming.
- Avoid writing in all caps – They are harder to read, and some screen readers spell out each letter instead of reading the word.

- Use left-aligned text – Justified text can create uneven spacing, making it difficult for dyslexic readers to track lines.
- Choose a readable font – Ensure text is clear and legible for all users.
- Use sufficient line spacing – Set line height to at least 1.5 times the font size.
- Provide enough paragraph spacing – Ensure paragraph spacing is at least 2 times the font size to prevent text from feeling cramped.
- Limit the width of text blocks – Avoid full-width text. Keep line length to around 80 characters (including spaces) for better readability.

Avoid putting important information in PDFs

PDFs can often be inaccessible, as many are not properly formatted for screen readers. If a PDF is not structured correctly, people using assistive technology may be unable to navigate, search, or understand the content.

Top tips for PDFs:

- Where possible, provide information as a web page instead – HTML pages are more accessible, mobile-friendly, and easier to update.
- Ensure PDFs are accessible – Use tagged PDFs, proper heading structures, and text that can be selected (not just scanned images).
- Check PDF accessibility before publishing – Use tools like Adobe Acrobat's Accessibility Checker or Microsoft's built-in accessibility tools.
- If a PDF is not fully accessible, state this in your accessibility statement – Let users know how they can request an alternative format.

Use tables sparingly

Tables can be difficult for screen readers to make sense of. The software reads from left to right and top to bottom – so it's best to use only simple tables with clear headings.

Add an accessibility statement to your site

An accessibility statement lets disabled users know what they can expect from your website and outlines any accessibility limitations.

For a useful template, you can refer to the UK Government's sample accessibility statement for public sector bodies: www.gov.uk/government/publications/sample-accessibility-statement

Even if your site isn't a public sector website, this template is a great starting point for creating a clear, user-friendly accessibility statement.

Images and multimedia

Add alt text for images

When adding a non-decorative image to your website, use the 'alt text' option to provide a brief, meaningful description so screen readers can convey the content to people who can't see the image. Try to describe the information rather than the picture.

If an image is purely decorative, leave the alt text field empty ("") so screen readers ignore it.

Make sure that you provide enough information to convey what the image contains between the alt text, caption and any other text on the webpage.

Provide subtitles and transcripts for video

Videos should include transcripts or subtitles to make them accessible to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or prefer reading over listening. Even a text summary of the key points is better than nothing. It's also best to avoid having video or audio content that plays automatically as well as flashing or blinking content to prevent discomfort or seizures.

Provide transcripts for audio

Just as images aren't accessible to people who can't see, audio files aren't accessible to those who can't hear. Providing a text transcript makes the audio information available to people who struggle to hear.

Colour contrasts

Text should have high contrast against the background to make it easy to read. Insufficient contrast not only affects people with low vision, but it also even affects those with good vision using devices in bright sunlight.

Use a contrast checker to meet accessibility standards: webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker

Support keyboard navigation

You will need some technical help with this last recommendation. It's an important one though because many people can't use a mouse and rely on keyboard navigation. This includes people with limited movement, such as those who have had a stroke, arthritis, or even a broken arm.

Users navigate using the Tab key to move between elements, Enter to activate buttons, and Arrow keys for menus. Try it on your own site: press Tab to move forward or Shift + Tab to go backwards.

For keyboard navigation, you will need to implement 'focus indicators' – these are the outlines that show up around a button, link or form field. Anything you'd interact with using a mouse should have visible focus. Finally, adding a 'Skip to Content' link allows users to bypass navigation and reach the main content quickly.

Conclusion

Improving your website's accessibility won't just help everyone who uses it. It's also important for future-proofing your site to stay compliant with evolving legal regulations. In the UK, public sector websites are legally required to comply with WCAG 2.2 AA. It's also good to be aware of The European Accessibility Act (EAA), which comes into force on 28 June 2025. Although it's currently mainly focused on private sector firms trading in the EU, it may affect other sectors in future.

However, as we said at the beginning, the main benefit is that your website will be as friendly and welcoming to everyone as your physical spaces.

Find out more about MeThree: aim-museums.co.uk/suppliers/methree/

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The hidden cost of burnout – and how to beat it



AIM Trustee Laura Crossley on the high cost of burnout to the sector and what we can all do to help.

Funded by Clore and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for the last six months, I've been researching burnout in the cultural sector, conducting 28 interviews and gathering 165 survey responses from sector workers. Half of those I've heard from work in museums. My research has found burnout in the cultural sector is at crisis level.

Systemic and organisational issues are largely to blame. We cannot ignore the impact of systemic issues, such as the cost-of-living crisis, lack of funding, and the long effects of Covid-19 pandemic. Racism, ableism, and other structural inequalities also impact significantly on burnout, with people of the Global Majority, disabled workers and those with caring responsibilities experiencing a higher level of burnout than others.

The personal cost of burnout is deeply concerning. People reported developing mental health issues; prolonged exhaustion; damage to personal relationships; and a loss of confidence and self-esteem. Burnout is also affecting organisations, with staff needing to take time off sick, or feeling less focused and motivated. It can also halt innovation, collaboration and creativity, all of which are required to enable the sector find solutions to the challenges it is facing. Many felt a sense of hopelessness; worrying that nothing can be done to create a sector that does not leave its workers feeling burnt out.

However, my research found this is not the case.

Firstly, we must acknowledge burnout is happening and is a crisis – and take action to make positive change. On a personal level, we can work to put in place personal boundaries, for example, taking annual leave. However, organisations must play their part too.

Here are some top tips:

- The primary reason given for burnout was having too much to do. While we are working in a challenging environment, prioritising can feel impossible – but it is

essential. Have a strong vision, mission and forward plan in place, and prioritise work that meets your strategic objectives. Adopt 'purpose-driven productivity', prioritising activities that align with your museum's purpose. When a new potential project arises, consider the potential impact on staff and don't overstretch.

- Allocate time in diaries for strategy, thinking, and rest – they are essential tools for creative, innovative thinking; and organisational resilience.
- Talk with and listen to staff and volunteers – how are they feeling? If they're burnt out, explore what is causing this and work together to find solutions.
- Create anti-discrimination policies and embed inclusive working practices.
- Include burnout in risk registers – it is a substantial risk to personal and organisational health.
- Model anti-burnout behaviours; for example, take breaks and leave on time. If you need work outside working hours, consider putting a delay on emails sent during the evening and weekend so they are received during work hours.
- Offer mental health days and extra time off after energy-sapping activities, such as big events and exhibition installations.
- Create safe working environments. Adopt a no tolerance policy for bullying and harassment.
- Wellbeing measures, like putting on a yoga class, might be helpful for some, but they can make staff feel worse if they are viewed as 'sticking plaster' over a poor working culture. That's not to say don't deliver wellbeing sessions, but these must be embedded alongside creating a happy working culture.

The wider sector can also play a part in preventing burnout by, for example, offering coaching and mentoring; providing funding for individuals to take sabbaticals and more funding to cover core costs; and ensuring funding covers realistic development and delivery costs, including fair pay for staff and freelancers.

You can find out more in my research paper available online this summer. Together, we can make a difference.

AIM Associate Supplier **Volta Compliance** on the sustainable energy solutions they found for **Bamburgh Castle and Tadcaster Community Trust**.

Bamburgh Castle.

Preserving heritage and powering communities

Whether modernising electrical systems in centuries-old buildings or implementing cutting-edge renewable solutions, Volta Compliance specialise in helping businesses, heritage sites, and community spaces enhance energy efficiency, reduce costs, and improve their sustainability.

Two recent projects – at Bamburgh Castle and Tadcaster Community Trust – highlight how smart electrical upgrades can reduce energy consumption, improve safety, and support long-term sustainability.

Lighting Up a Historic Landmark: LED Upgrades at Bamburgh Castle

Standing majestically on the Northumberland coastline, Bamburgh Castle is one of the UK's most breathtaking heritage sites, with a history stretching back over 1,400 years. As a popular visitor attraction, the castle's exterior lighting plays a crucial role in enhancing visibility, security, and aesthetic appeal. However, outdated lighting was causing high energy consumption, increased running costs, and frequent maintenance issues. Volta Compliance was tasked with upgrading the castle's exterior lighting system, replacing inefficient fixtures with modern, energy-efficient LED lighting.

One of the key challenges of this project was ensuring the new lighting complemented the castle's historic aesthetic. Working closely with conservation specialists, we selected discreet, high-performance LED fixtures that maintain the integrity of the site while delivering a dramatic visual improvement. The new system provides:

- A 60% reduction in energy consumption, significantly cutting electricity costs
- Enhanced illumination, showcasing the castle's striking architecture at night
- Lower maintenance requirements, thanks to the longer lifespan of LED bulbs
- Improved security, with better-lit pathways and perimeters

This upgrade ensures Bamburgh Castle remains a beautifully illuminated landmark while embracing sustainable, low-carbon technology – a perfect balance between history and modern efficiency.

Harnessing Solar Power: Tadcaster Community Trust's Renewable Energy Transformation

With energy prices continuing to rise, Tadcaster Community Trust faced mounting electricity costs, placing financial strain on its essential services. The Trust operates a vital community hub, supporting local residents with social programmes, events, and public facilities. However, the increasing cost of powering the building threatened its ability to sustain these services. To tackle this challenge, Volta Compliance installed a solar panel system tailored to the Trust's needs. By switching to solar power, the Trust now benefits from:

- Significant energy savings, reducing electricity costs year after year
- On-site renewable energy generation, decreasing reliance on the grid
- Lower carbon emissions, contributing to a greener, more sustainable community

- Increased energy independence, protecting against volatile energy prices

The solar panels were strategically installed to maximise energy capture, ensuring the Trust gets the most from renewable, cost-free electricity. As a result, daytime energy consumption is now significantly supported by solar energy, dramatically cutting energy bills. Additionally, the system features smart energy monitoring, allowing the Trust to track energy generation and consumption in real time. This data helps them make informed decisions about energy use, further optimising efficiency.

By investing in solar panel technology, Tadcaster Community Trust is now less vulnerable to rising energy costs, allowing more resources to be redirected into vital community services rather than spiralling utility bills.

A sustainable future

Both projects highlight Volta Compliance's expertise in blending innovation with sustainability to support heritage landmarks and community spaces. Whether modernising historic sites with efficient lighting or helping local hubs embrace renewable energy, our mission remains the same – to help businesses and organisations lower costs, improve safety, and achieve long-term energy efficiency. We take pride in delivering bespoke electrical solutions that not only meet compliance and sustainability goals but also ensure our clients are well-prepared for the future of energy.

Learn more about how Volta Compliance can help your organisation at volta.compliance.com

The Ruskin Museum

A small independent museum based in Coniston, nestled under the beautiful backdrop of the Yewdale Fells.

The Ruskin Museum was opened in 1901 by W.G Collingwood in memory of John Ruskin, the Victorian polymath who lived in Coniston from 1872 until his death in 1900. Originally set up to display Ruskin's watercolours, drawings and minerals of geological importance, over the years the collection has grown and the Museum has been extended twice.

In 1999 the first extension was completed, and the Coniston Gallery was created. It depicts the history of Coniston with displays on The Coniston Railway, Coniston Copper mines (we mark the start of the Copper mines trail), Coniston Slate mines, Coniston Mountain Rescue and Arthur Ransome.

We tell the story of Jimmy Hewitson, a local hero who was awarded the Victoria Cross, explore the lives of the Lakeland Herdwick sheep farmers, the Langdale Linen industry, and we hold the world's largest collection of Ruskin Lace. "Mavis", the sailing boat made famous by Arthur Ransome in the Swallows and Amazons books can also be found in the Coniston Gallery.

The miniature village of Riverdale is very much a part of everyone's visit to the Museum and is enjoyed by thousands of visitors, young and old. Created by the late John Usher (1940 – 1993), a local builder, the village is tribute to his memory and unique skills.

In the garden we have a V12 Merlin aero-engine from a Halifax Bomber. In 1944 the bomber crashed into Great Carrs above Coniston and sadly eight servicemen lost their lives, seven Canadian and one British. The engine on display was recovered in 1997.

In 2008 the Bluebird Wing was built to house the record-breaking hydroplane Bluebird K7 which was owned by Donald Campbell CBE. Campbell was tragically killed in 1967 when trying to achieve 300mph on Coniston Water. After the accident the Campbell family requested that the crash site be treated as a grave and for 34 years this was the case. However major advances in diving equipment and technology rendered the



Portrait of John Ruskin by W.G Collingwood, Ruskin's secretary and founder of the museum.

site increasingly vulnerable and in 2001 Bluebird K7 and Donald Campbell were recovered from Coniston Water.

Donald was laid to rest in the village cemetery and Bluebird K7 was donated to the Ruskin Museum so she would be on permanent display. The wing now houses Bluebird K7 alongside many of Donald Campbell's personal possessions, photos and artefacts.

On 9th March 2024, after being away from Coniston for 23 years, Bluebird K7 finally arrived back home to Coniston and the museum saw record breaking numbers of visitors. Historically visitor numbers averaged around 10,000 per year, but with the return of K7 this rocketed to over 63,000 in 2024.

The Ruskin Museum is open all year round, with reduced hours in the winter months, and employs seven members of staff, while being managed by a board of Trustees. The Museum receives no public funding and relies entirely on admissions and shop sales. It has Arts Council Accreditation and has been regularly awarded Tripadvisor's Traveller's Choice awards. Plans for the future include developing and updating the exhibitions and incorporating more interactive displays.

We are also in early planning stages of running Bluebird K7 on Coniston Water in 2026, 70 years since Donald Campbell achieved his first record on Coniston Water.

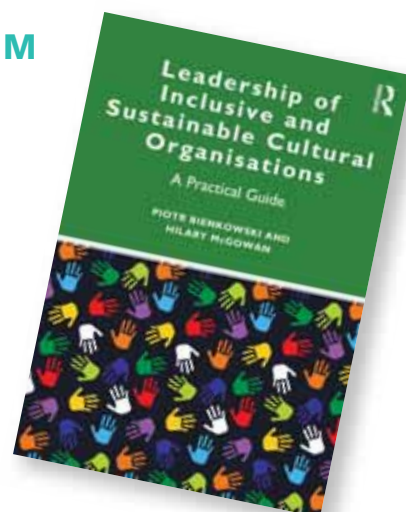
Tracy Hodgson, Director

www.ruskinmuseum.com



As she releases a new book, Hilary McGowan, Governance and Leadership Consultant and AIM Associate Supplier, offers Top Tips for being a healthy, successful leader in difficult times.

Leading an inclusive and sustainable cultural organisation



Leadership is vital, so make time to be strategic. It is too easy to get swallowed up by the day-to-day work which should be the responsibility of your staff and volunteers. Details may feel safe for you, but they are not the preserve of leaders.

What makes a good Leader?

Lead, not do – you have staff/volunteers to do the doing – and inspire, not tell – if they believe, they will get on and achieve. Your role as a leader is to inspire hope for a better future. Many Museums are in crisis, and not only from a financial point of view. So, lead the organisation in a positive direction and demonstrate to your staff and volunteers that you believe in success.

There are five key qualities to successfully lead a museum in challenging times:

- Determination
- Flexibility
- Political antennae
- Empathy/sensitivity
- A thick skin

Managing your own well-being

Make your well-being your priority. Consider your work style, and any bad habits, and put in place new habits or rituals that will create a better life balance and make you more effective and resilient as a leader, e.g.:

- Set well-being goals and develop these into a routine that becomes second-nature
- Set boundaries with your staff/volunteers
- Block off time in the diary for your personal life and for self-reflection and do not let work spill over into non-work time
- Stay connected to prevent isolation, both with your colleagues and your personal network, so take part in peer discussions/meetings or visits to refresh yourself.
- Involve the superior: acknowledge their experience and play to their ego by getting their input in discussion. Ask them some leading, open questions to invite insight from their own experiences (though be ready to counter the depressingly familiar 'we tried this 20 years ago, it didn't work then, so it won't work now').
- Find an external champion who your boss will listen to or work 'under the radar.'

Influencing upwards

As a museum leader you will always have people above you that you must get on your side, such as chairs of governing bodies or more senior managers in a larger organisation. So, influencing upwards is a critical skill for all leaders to stay sane but also to make progress for your museum:

- Explain how your objectives support organisational goals and mission, and therefore how your approach addresses the superior's priorities and helps them do their job better.
- Emphasise how the benefits outweigh the costs and risks. Be prepared to argue that, in some cases, doing nothing is itself a greater risk.

Embrace Diversity

Museums, like many cultural organisations, have work to do on improving diversity. In our experience, some governing bodies are even intimidated by the topic. Yet, diversity makes your organisation *better*. It removes barriers for marginalised people to realise their potential. Commitment to diversity ensures that, by not discriminating, you attract the best talent too. And diverse teams provide a better perspective and understanding of what the communities you serve want to see, hear, or do. So, don't be daunted, embrace diversity!

Leadership of Inclusive and Sustainable Cultural Organisations: a practical guide, by Piotr Bienkowski & Hilary McGowan, 2025
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Editor MATT SMITH

Email: editor@aim-museums.co.uk

Contact AIM

Online: www.aim-museums.co.uk

By phone: 0333 305 8060

By post: AIM Postal, PO Box 181, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 9DR



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