

**Committee:** Scrutiny 2  
**Date:** 6 July 2005  
**Agenda Item No:**  
**Title:** BV170c School Pupils receiving taught sessions at Museum  
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### Summary

- 1 Clarification was requested by members of the apparent shortfall in the 2004-05 target for numbers of school pupils visiting the Museum for taught sessions with the Education Officer. Analysis of school visits in recent years has led to a slightly reduced but more realistic target of 6,500 pupils, from 7,000, for the reasons given below.
- 2 There are a number of factors outside the Museum's control (chiefly increasing transport costs for schools and more days when schools do not go out, and in some cases a slight reduction in class sizes) which have contributed to a small decrease in numbers of pupils, though not in overall demand for the service. Also there is a need to balance the Education Officer's workload between schools and other educational activities, notable the holiday programmes, and increase numbers of other users and visitors (BVPI170a and b). BVPI 170c is a very inadequate instrument for measuring the effectiveness of museums' educational services; an example is given of a recent initiative by the Education Officer which improved use of the service by a local school, but could not be included in the BVPI as it is currently defined.

### Background

3. **Definition of BVPI 170c.** This refers to numbers of pupils in sessions taught by the Education Officer in booked sessions in the Museum. It does not include the small number of schools making independent visits (i.e. visiting the Museum but now wanting to book or pay for a taught session), or any teaching the Education Officer does at other venues.
4. **Ages and Sessions Taught.** The vast majority of all school visits are from Primary Schools, especially Key Stages 2 and 3 (this is true for museum school visits across the country). The unusual range of collections in the Museum make it possible for the Education Officer to offer sessions on National Curriculum (NC) topics which cannot be offered by many other museums, e.g. Ancient Egypt, and these are continually being reviewed to

meet the demands of the NC and individual schools. As the total number of primary school pupils in Uttlesford is currently 5,631, and the Museum's school visit total for 2004-05 was 6,463, the Museum Service is already "punching above its weight" due to its ability to draw schools from other areas.

5. **Demand.** The demand for the service has not decreased, as the Education Officer continues to be booked far in advance for virtually every available teaching day and sometimes not all requests can be accommodated. Similarly independent research carried out by ABL (Audience Development Plan 2005) confirms other feedback that the service is highly regarded by users. The Museum continues to attract schools from outside Uttlesford and outside Essex, as well as schools from across the district.

### **Factors leading to slight reduction in numbers**

6. There are a number of factors contributing the reduction in pupils. While none of these are very significant in themselves, cumulatively they have resulted in a small reduction overall, from round about 7,000 pupils per year until a couple of years ago to around 6,500 per year now. The net result is that the Education Officer now teaches around 140-145 sessions per year, compared to around 170 a few years ago.
7. **Transport Costs** have increased for schools and have led to a few cancellations when parents have been unable or unwilling to meet the costs of coach hire. These cancellations occur usually too late to get another school to take up the free day.
8. **Days When Schools Cannot Take Pupils Out.** As well as the usual beginning- and end-of-term periods when schools are pre-occupied with other issues, there has been an increase during the last 2-3 years in the number of days when there are no trips out due to training for school staff ("Baker Days" and similar initiatives). Changes in structure and dates of term times are another factor, as witnessed around Easter 2005, when some schools were wanting to book sessions in the same weeks as others were expecting holiday activities!
9. **Class sizes.** Bigger classes obviously mean higher numbers of pupils, but in some quarters at least there has been a slight reduction in class sizes rather than an increase (observation by Education Officer). Bookings are taken on a 'first come, first served' basis irrespective of class size, and we cannot discriminate in favour of schools with larger classes as this would disadvantage smaller schools from rural areas and special needs schools.
10. **Balance between Schools and other Work Programmes.** The Education Officer's role is only partially concerned with schools. She is also involved in all types of Learning Activities, other aspects of the work of the Museum Service, Council and educational sector, e.g. recently chairing a Council working group on the Children's Act, which involved attending a conference in London. Just as some of the Education Officer's time in school holidays needs

to be spend devising and revising sessions for schools, so some of her time during term has to be directed to planning, consulting and organising holiday programmes and a wide range of other activities and events, in conjunction with other Museum staff and external partners, This is especially important where external funding, publicity deadlines and booking of artists, demonstrators or re-enactment groups are involved. It has therefore become necessary to build occasional 'school-free' days into her timetable to enable her to keep pace with the many demands. As far as possible, these are days when schools are less likely to book visits, although independent visits are of course still possible.

11. Allowance also has to be made for the Education Officer to occasionally take TOIL earned for evening and weekend work and Annual Leave during term time – it cannot all be timetabled for school holidays and half-terms, especially as the Museum is expected to run holiday activities as well.
12. **Limitations imposed by Timetables, Facilities and Staff Resources.** We cannot take more than one school per day. Schools arrive typically around 10am and leave in the early afternoon, so a visit takes a whole school day. Both the small schoolroom and the only available large gallery space (ground floor, Great Hall) are used, and larger classes have to be split between different areas. This can impact on the experience for other visitors. To take two schools at a time would require the building of an additional large classroom and a schools reception area with toilets, plus the employment of a second Education Officer. While plans to improve facilities for schools are part of the Museum Service's long-term plans, being discussed between the Museum Society and Museum Management Task Group, this will not be achieved easily or without significant extra resources.
13. **Limitations of BVPI 170c : a recent example.** Emphasis in the Museum Service is as much with quality of service and developing audiences, as with simple user numbers (as being addressed in current Resource Centre and marketing plans). While emphasis is always on bringing schools into the Museum, we must also make an effort to engage with local schools which do not or cannot visit museums. Accordingly, last term the Education Officer made a pilot all-day visit to a school at Henham, where about 150 pupils benefited from her tuition, with Museum handling collections. However, because this did not take place in the Museum, the numbers could not be included in the BVPI and so innovative practices can sometimes be detrimental to the BVPI target. If we develop this service to (say) 2 'visits out' per term, this will cause a further slight decrease in the BVPI figure, despite increasing the number of local school pupils benefiting from the Service.
14. There is frustration in the museum sector at the difficulty of measuring cultural services adequately. Representations have been made that the Department Culture, Media & Sport, the Audit Commission and the government's Accreditation scheme for Museums (the successor to Registration) should do more to co-ordinate and develop measures of museums' impact on society.

### **The Long-term Picture**

15. For the foreseeable future, we anticipate maintaining about 140-145 taught sessions per year, and that demand will continue at current high levels, therefore the reduction in numbers of pupils taught in the Museum should stabilise at around 6,500 per year.
16. A 'one-off' reduction in the target figure for 2005-06 to 5,500 is due to the Education Officer going into hospital which inevitably reduced numbers of school visits May –July 2005.
17. The Museum will be looking to develop other types of links with schools, especially secondary schools which in general use museums very little. Next year we are assisting Saffron Walden County High Travel & Tourism students, and the Resource Centre project envisages developing a 'pilot package' for secondary schools, amongst other outreach, all of which will require different types of performance indicators to monitor their success.
18. Meanwhile the facilities at the Museum are in danger of becoming outdated, for instance restricted number of toilets and lack of teaching space, compared to other venues. Museum charges (currently £2-00 per pupil for taught sessions) are to be reviewed later this year and this could also have an impact. We will need to keep alert to what other venues are offering. e.g. Chelmsford Museum Service now offers a free service to all schools.