

**Creative Cultures**

MLA West Midlands

**EVALUATION OF THE  
PAY & POWER PROJECT**

**FINAL REPORT**

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# MLA West Midlands EVALUATION OF THE PAY & POWER PROJECT FINAL REPORT

## Executive Summary

### The Pay & Power Project and its Significance

Pay & Power is a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funded regional consortium project aimed at increasing archive resources publicly available in the West Midlands. The project began in March 2004 and is due to complete its work in March 2007.

The Pay & Power project brings together fourteen record offices from local authorities, universities, the Roman Catholic Church and the independent sector. It has four aims:

1. To increase physical and online access to archive collections
2. To widen awareness of collection content; to improve service to current users and develop new audiences
3. To develop a strategic approach to opening up access to uncatalogued archive collections and meeting user needs
4. To develop strategic partnership working within the archive domain.

The Pay & Power project is of particular significance in a number of respects:

- bringing together West Midlands record offices to focus on user need and identify ways to approach and secure the involvement of previously under-represented audiences
- carrying out a complex cataloguing programme using a central project team
- cataloguing eighteen previously uncatalogued collections from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which were identified for cataloguing under a single theme of 'Pay & Power' – representing the subjects of 'work' and 'politics' which have shaped much of the heritage of the West Midlands and the UK.
- seeking through over 30 varied outreach activities to create greater awareness of and access to the region's archival heritage, particularly amongst groups who are not usually visitors to archives.
- creating on-line access and carrying out promotional work over a three-year period
- in undertaking an ambitious strategic project involving cataloguing, outreach and promotional activity delivered through a variety of partnerships.

### The Evaluation of Pay & Power

The key aim of this evaluation is:

*'to evaluate the impact of the HLF funded Pay & Power project in relation to its four aims and the effectiveness of the investment in the cataloguing*

*programme and the workshops and training sessions. Also to recommend strategic approaches to MLA West Midlands and the consortium members to sustain the aims of the project beyond its current funding.'*

This evaluation of the Pay & Power project demonstrates that:

- the project was a significant attempt to tackle the problem of uncatalogued collections among the Record Offices of the West Midlands and to explore ways to serve both current and new audiences for record offices
- it has delivered what may be for the archives sector an unprecedented number of joint activities within the overall timescale and the agreed budget
- the choice of collections for cataloguing was successful, determined as it was by the theme and the resource requirements of the project
- a complex cataloguing programme was delivered successfully although there were issues of quality of the results and of supervision of cataloguing staff
- there were other benefits from the cataloguing and provision of on-line access including staff and volunteer training on catalogue and related areas
- the outreach programme was very successful in improving awareness amongst outreach participants from professional and community groups alike
- the outreach activities boosted understanding and knowledge of archives in general and of the collections of the host record offices in particular
- the outreach programme has impacted on the archives taking part by changing the way they approach all aspects of education and outreach work; planning, delivery and evaluation
- wider community impacts and linkages have been achieved, for example, several of the Pay & Power sessions have led to plans to work with different organisations and local authority services to develop inter-generational projects.
- the project would have benefited from an approach which began with an examination of user needs and planned cataloguing and outreach work accordingly
- the work of the Project Manager and Outreach Officer in their documentation and analysis of the outreach work allowed the immediate impacts on participants in training, workshops and other events to be captured effectively
- the use of the Inspiring Learning for All (ILFA) framework was particularly welcomed by the project consortium and has been useful in gathering data from delegates who attended the outreach events from both professional and community sectors
- partnership working was a successful feature of the project and new partnerships were created between the project team and the Record Offices and across some sub-regional groupings and with a significant number of bodies from outside the archive sector

- the project was hampered by an early lack of understanding of and commitment to the extensive audience development element of the project and this weakened Pay & Power as a genuine *regional* partnership.

## **The Recommendations**

The evaluation has resulted in recommendations for all parties involved when considering further joint work and audience development activities in the region.

### **1. Advocacy**

#### **Highlighting Backlogs**

MLA West Midlands and Heads of Service should ensure that the issues of collecting policies and increasing cataloguing backlogs are highlighted in any appropriate advocacy initiatives.

#### **Engaging with Funding Bodies**

MLA West Midlands and the Heads of Archive Services should enter into a dialogue with the Heritage Lottery Fund and other funders on the recommendations.

### **2. A User Focus**

#### **Starting with the User**

Future audience development projects should be based on a clear understanding of the needs of any target audiences, and that activities are planned with the overall aim and objective of how to reach these, and what might be offered to them. Research should be carried out prior to planning of events, and included in the individual services' strategic development.

### **3. Future Project Management**

#### **A Flexible and Open Project Management Approach**

Future partnership projects, would benefit from a) a presentation to and discussion by those participating focussing particularly on what will be required of partners before being submitted to funding bodies, and b) a programme and project management approach which emphasised the needs of an 'open' environment including the continuing and two-way responsibilities of partnership.

### **4. Supporting the Workforce**

#### **Workforce Development**

Future regional projects should identify skills required (cataloguing, supervision, audience development, communications, for example) within the project team and project partners to ensure all project requirements are met. This requires a flexible approach and could include support for secondments or external consultants to meet the need for specialised skills. Developing the skills of the project team and encouraging their career development should also be an integral part of any future project.

## 5. Building Partnerships

### **Stronger Partnerships**

MLA West Midlands and Heads of Service should ensure that the programme, resourcing and timescale of any future collaboration allows for more communication and increased 'whole partnership' involvement in the detailed development of the project to ensure partners understand the project and to enhance commitment to all its aims.

### **Sub-regional groupings**

MLA West Midlands and Heads of Service should investigate ways in which they can build on the work of the Pay and Power outreach team to encourage the further development of sub-regional groupings. These should be able to support development of joint resource use and funding applications to boost the continuing development of capacity for and delivery of outreach and access activity amongst the region's record offices. In addition sub-regional groupings should be seen as offering an effective route to further strengthen capacity for working with other sectors, particularly in education and cross domain working with other cultural and heritage organisations.

## 6. Evaluating Future Projects

### **Cataloguing Assessment Tool**

The Worcestershire collection assessment tool (or any other similar tools available locally or nationally) should be examined to see if it can be used by other record offices. Future regional cataloguing schemes should apply the same assessment criteria, which include an element of how collections can be used.

### **Standards & Benchmarks**

Building on the recommendations in the Regional Archive Strategy, consistent standards for data collection, including remote and physical use of the Pay & Power collections, should be established and maintained.

### **Inspiring Learning For All (ILFA)**

MLA West Midlands should build on existing ILFA networks and training to support further applications of ILFA and other methodologies, especially the GLOs, for monitoring and evaluating the work of the archives sector given the positive results of the use of ILFA with Pay & Power.

### **Longitudinal Evaluation**

Future approaches to evaluation of audience development should take into account the need to plan for post-evaluation and tracking of outcomes over an extended timeframe, including incorporating a proper baseline and mechanisms for tracking impacts on new audiences.

### **Value For Money**

Future projects should include value for money and additional value assessments throughout their planning and delivery to ensure this can be fully captured and assessed by future evaluation.