Irish Museums Association (IMA)

Report

Teachers' Survey:
museum engagement during and post-Covid 19

Education is a key activity of the museum. Indeed, it is integral to its purpose and definition. Through their collections and research, museums are uniquely placed to provide trusted and comprehensible information on our past, interpret this in the context of our present and encourage exploration of our future.

Through effective partnerships, museums and schools can assist each other in fulfilling their goals and addressing their needs. Museums complement the curriculum by providing examples of narratives that assist students in understanding and making emotional connections to academic learning and help them develop analytical and social skills. At the same time, schools offer museums the opportunity to increase their impact on the communities they serve and develop their resources.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, museums and cultural institutions have been among the first to close their doors as restrictions increased. Museum programming has focused on creating opportunities for audiences of all ages to realise their creative potential along with gaining new knowledge and skills. Despite the huge difficulties faced, museums have successfully continued to find ways to inspire and engage with audiences of all ages.

it is with this in mind that, as a sector, we look towards enhancing our partnerships with schools. With this survey, the Irish Museums Association (IMA) aims to support these essential relationships and provide insight on how we can ensure museums and schools can continue to connect and provide supportive offerings to students and strengthen these partnerships in the years ahead.
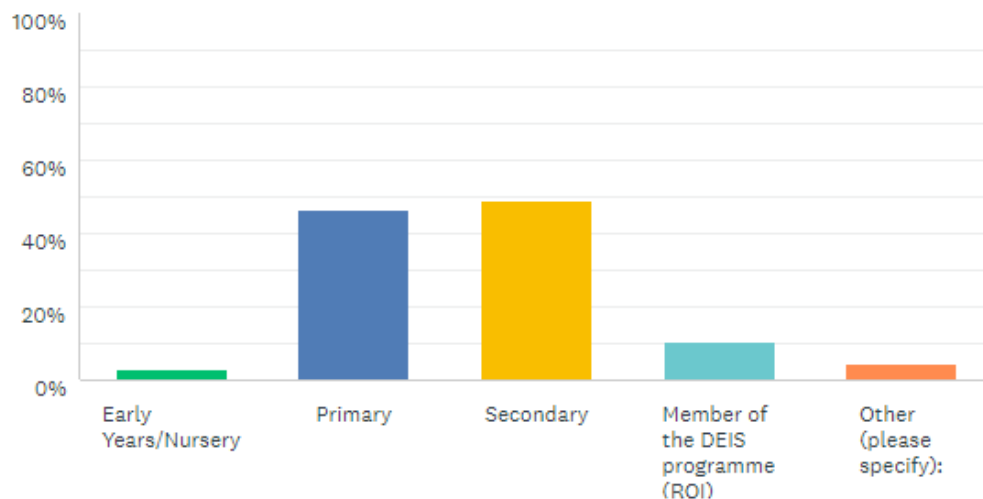
Responses were collected during the period 18 September – 18 October 2020. On the evening of 18 September, it was announced that Dublin museums were to close as the county was placed on Level 3 under Ireland's *Framework for Living with COVID-19*. Further regional lockdowns took place in late September, with all counties in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) seeing their museums close from midnight on 6 October 2020, with widespread lockdowns announced on 19 October in both ROI and Northern Ireland (NI).

Who responded?

A wide call was issued via individual museums, through educational resource platforms and over social media, to teachers across the island with 243 completed responses received.

The survey captured responses from schools and educational centres in almost every county (with the exceptions of Longford and Fermanagh). Approximately one third (33%) of the responses were from schools based in Dublin and a further third (33%) based in Cork, Armagh, Limerick, Donegal, Monaghan and Kilkenny, with the remainder spread across the other 23 counties.

Of these, post-primaries were well represented, making up 49% of the responses, and primary schools accounted for 46.5% (81.2% in NI). 10.7% were also members of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme and 2%, Special Schools. Other educational institutions represented were: Early years/Nursery: 2.9%, Further Education Centres: 3%, and a prison education centre.
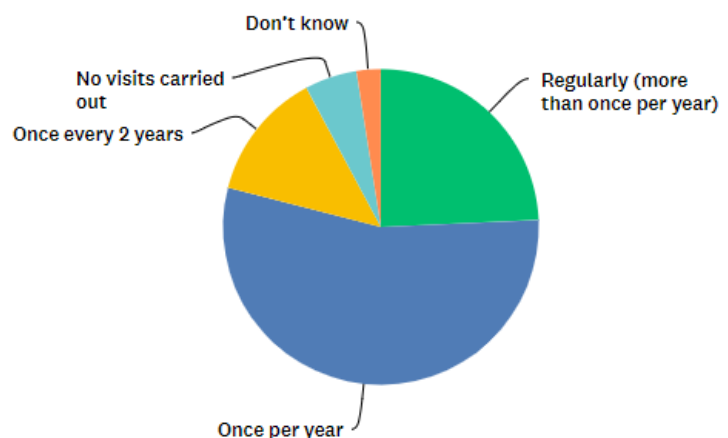

How often would they have engaged with museums pre-2020?

Physical visits

The vast majority of teachers responding to the survey would have typically brought their class to a museum at least once per year (79%), with almost a quarter of all respondents visiting more frequently (24.3%).

13.2% visited only once every two years and 7.8% of those surveyed either didn't know or had not carried out any visits to museums.

Overall, schools were evenly split between those that had accessed online museum resources either pre or during the Covid-19 pandemic and those that had not, at 49% and 51% respectively. There was a marked distinction however between jurisdictions with 84.4% of respondents in Northern Ireland (NI) indicating they had not previously availed of online offerings.
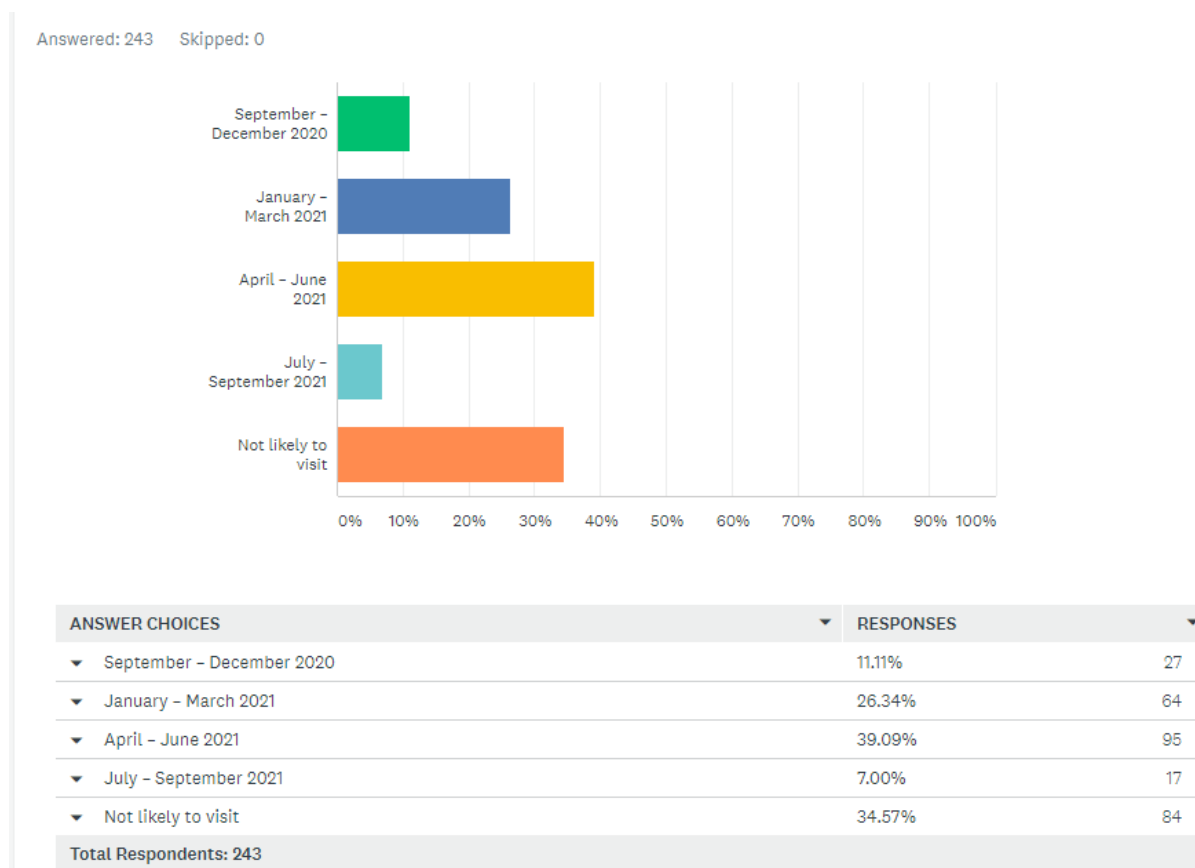
It is worth noting that, of the 42 responses initiated but not completed, 33 respondents did not proceed any further with the survey after indicating they had not previously engaged with museums.

Attitudes towards physical visits to museums in the period September 2020 – September 2021

Looking ahead, most (39.1%) teachers saw April-June 2021 as the period when they would be most likely to physically visit a museum while social distancing or similar measures are still in place. Jan-March 2021 was the next most likely period for visits, selected by over a quarter (26.3%) of respondents.

A substantial number of teachers (34.6%) indicated that they would not be likely to visit while restrictions remain in place.

"There will likely be rolling lockdowns for the foreseeable future so risking organising a visit that may get pulled would not be worth the time or effort"

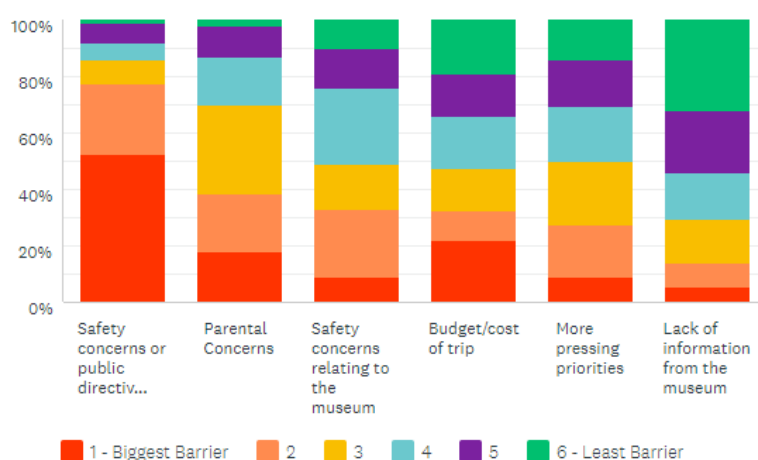| ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
▼ September – December 2020		11.11%	27
▼ January – March 2021		26.34%	64
▼ April – June 2021		39.09%	95
▼ July – September 2021		7.00%	17
▼ Not likely to visit		34.57%	84
Total Respondents: 243			

What are the barriers?

We asked respondents to rank on a scale of 1 – 6 the main challenges they see as presenting a barrier to physical museum visits, with 1 representing the biggest barrier. The majority (52.7%) cited safety concerns or public directives around travelling to and from the museum and the weighted average indicated parental concerns as the second highest rated barrier.

A significant amount of comments noted that the logistics of planning and undertaking a trip would be stressful for both teachers and pupils, and present a difficulty given restrictions are liable to change at short notice, along with the responsibility to keep students safe and less of an expectation of enjoyment:

'No matter how you approach it, that lovely, relaxed feel about visiting a museum is gone.'
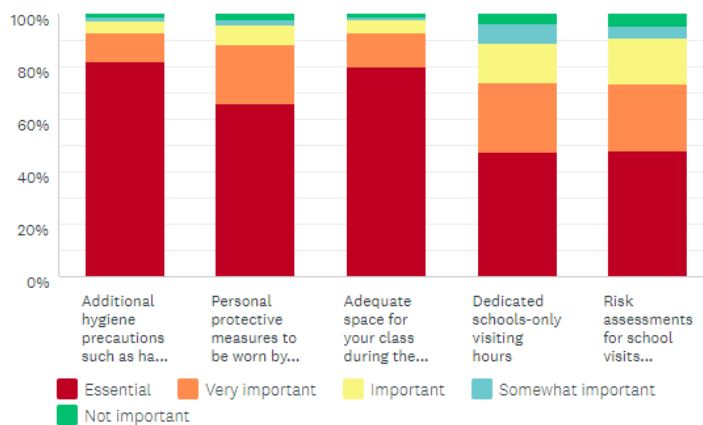
Answered: 241   Skipped: 2

	1 - BIGGEST BARRIER	2	3	4	5	6 - LEAST BARRIER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Safety concerns or public directives around travelling to and from the museum	52.74% 106	24.88% 50	8.46% 17	5.97% 12	6.97% 14	1.00% 2	201	5.07
Parental Concerns	17.80% 34	20.94% 40	31.41% 60	16.75% 32	10.99% 21	2.09% 4	191	4.12
Safety concerns relating to the museum	8.92% 14	24.20% 38	15.92% 25	26.75% 42	14.01% 22	10.19% 16	157	3.57
Budget/cost of trip	21.95% 36	10.37% 17	15.24% 25	18.29% 30	15.24% 25	18.90% 31	164	3.49
More pressing priorities	9.15% 15	18.29% 30	22.56% 37	19.51% 32	16.46% 27	14.02% 23	164	3.42
Lack of information from the museum	5.35% 10	8.56% 16	15.51% 29	16.58% 31	21.93% 41	32.09% 60	187	2.63

Related to the issue of travel was the cost of trip, with 21.9% responding that budgetary reasons were the biggest barrier. Specifically, the prohibitive cost of hiring and staffing two coaches in order to allow for social distancing was a particular issue for rural schools. However, the issue of cost is only a problem for certain schools, and a similar amount of respondents (18.9%) cited it as the lowest rated barrier when it comes to making a trip to a museum.

Lack of information from the museum is not deemed a significant issue with almost a third (32.1%) citing it as the least important barrier to a physical visit. Other responses pointed to internal policies and staffing issues, with school directives prohibiting class trips and understaffing making visits impractical.

What can museums do to address these barriers?

The vast majority of respondents cited additional hygiene precautions at the museum and adequate space for groups during the visit as essential to delivering confidence in the safety of a physical museum visit, at 81.9% and 79.7% respectively. Personal protective equipment worn by museum staff was also deemed essential by 66.1% of those surveyed.

	ESSENTIAL	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	TOTAL
Additional hygiene precautions such as hand sanitisers, waste disposal bins, and increased cleaning measures	81.89% 199	11.11% 27	4.53% 11	1.65% 4	0.82% 2	243
Personal protective measures to be worn by museum staff (and children where appropriate)	66.12% 160	22.31% 54	7.44% 18	2.07% 5	2.07% 5	242
Adequate space for your class during the visit	79.75% 193	13.22% 32	4.96% 12	1.24% 3	0.83% 2	242
Dedicated schools-only visiting hours	47.33% 115	26.75% 65	14.81% 36	7.41% 18	3.70% 9	243
Risk assessments for school visits	47.92% 115	25.83% 62	17.08% 41	4.58% 11	4.58% 11	240

Ultimately, the options given (extra hygiene precautions, adequate space, the wearing of PPE, dedicated school visiting hours and the provision of risk assessments) were all deemed to be at least somewhat important, with only 12% answering that one or more of these measures were not important.
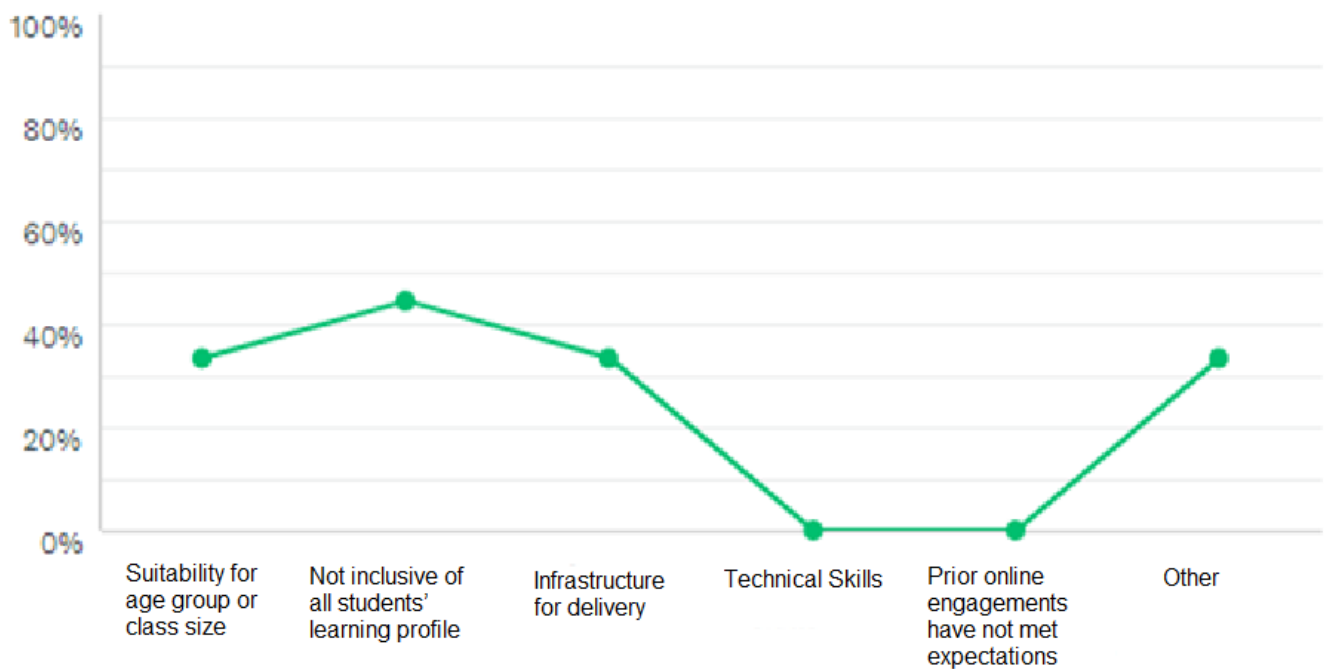
Additional suggestions received indicated concerns over maintaining the classroom bubble, noting that one-way systems, particular care taken at entrance/exit points and designated areas for both the visit and pre/post tour would be welcomed.

Despite a number of teachers deeming risk assessments as not important, among respondents in NI there was a marked increase in respondents deeming this as essential (84.4%) and clear communication indicating measures being submitted in advance to schools and parents was highlighted throughout the comments, along with inventive ways to communicate with students during safety briefing at the museum and dedicated staff contacts in advance and during the visit.

Attitudes towards online or off-site museum engagement

The overwhelming majority of respondents (96.03%) indicated they would be likely to avail of remote museum programmes or resources for their classroom in addition to or as an alternative to a physical museum visit.

Of the 9 respondents who indicated they would not engage in this way with the museum, adaptability to the student's learning profile were seen by four of these as the main barrier to availing of any resources, closely followed by the need for improved infrastructure for delivery and suitability for the age group or class size (each selected by three teachers). Additional comments indicated concerns around student engagement and complementary activities, along with relevance to their study area.
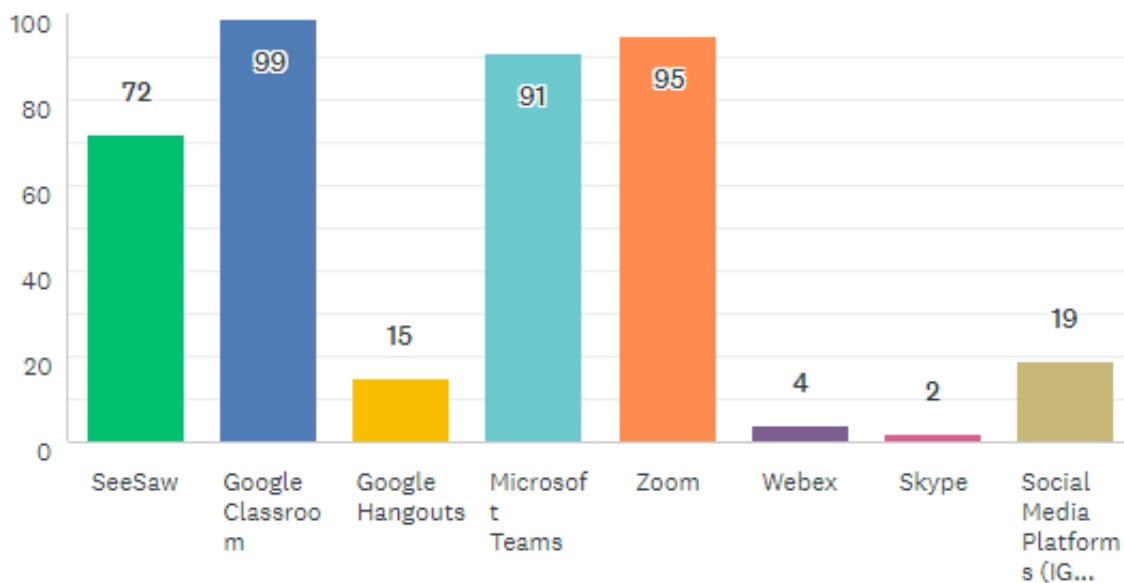
How do they want to engage?

The platforms most likely to be used by those indicating they would engage in remote learning are almost equal in popularity, with Google classroom (43%); Zoom (41.3%) and Microsoft Teams (39.6%) leading the way. Seesaw followed at 31.3%. Google hangouts was used by 6.5% while 8.3% made use of social media platforms. A small minority used platforms such as Webex (1.7%), Skype (0.9%) or other platforms such as Class Dojo, Edmodo, Filpgrid, or Showbie.

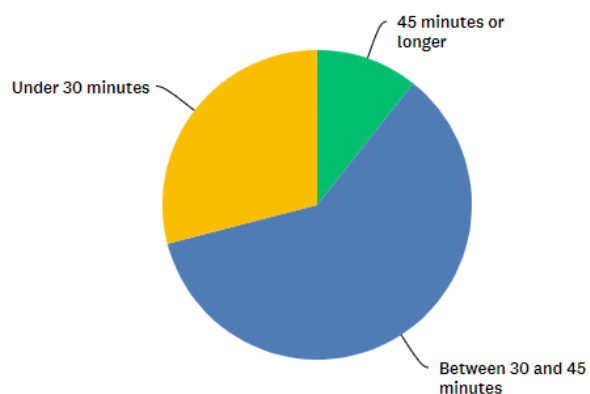Significantly, 52% are using multiple platforms and 48% are only using one online platform.

Another point to note from the comments was that three schools (1.26%) had little or no internet connection or were only using downloadable resources, emailed to parents.

How long should the sessions last?

Between 30 and 45 minutes was the optimal duration indicated for an online activity for 60.3% of respondents while under 30 minutes was chosen by 29% (54.8% in NI). Noted in the comments were suggestions for short bite-sized videos and/or Q&A sessions.

Only 10.7% of all respondents wishing to avail of online resources opted for sessions lasting over 45 minutes.

What resources are they most likely to use?

The remote programmes to deliver learning most likely to be availed of are downloadable content which the teacher can incorporate independently into the classroom, 83.62% indicating a strong preference for pre-recorded sessions with suggested activities and a similar proportion (83.91%) for resource material such as learning packs, worksheets, and lesson plans.

A blended approach was mentioned by many in the comments, with downloadable material being supplemented in particular through live Q&A sessions. Some respondents noted that while they would be keen to avail of museum staff visits, this was not possible during the pandemic.

Other comments indicated uncertainty over where to access resources and clear indications of different ability levels.

	LIKELY TO USE	SOMEWHAT LIKELY TO USE	NOT LIKELY TO USE	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Downloadable pre-recorded sessions with suggested activities	83.62% 194	16.38% 38	0.86% 2	232
Downloadable resources: learning packs, worksheets, lesson plans	83.91% 193	15.65% 36	0.87% 2	230
3-D scans of artefacts from the collections	62.11% 141	29.52% 67	8.37% 19	227
Self-guided virtual tours	56.28% 130	38.96% 90	5.63% 13	231
Live workshops or webinars with museum staff or specialists	51.75% 118	35.53% 81	12.72% 29	228
Live online tours	50.44% 115	35.53% 81	14.04% 32	228
'Museum at Home' homework resources	47.35% 107	35.40% 80	17.26% 39	226
Museum staff visits to schools	44.05% 100	29.07% 66	26.87% 61	227
Online games	39.82% 90	36.28% 82	23.89% 54	226
Loan of museum handling items	38.60% 88	23.25% 53	38.16% 87	228
Live reenactments	37.44% 85	34.80% 79	28.19% 64	227

What else?

We asked respondents whether there was anything not covered in this survey that they would like museums to consider in order to support and complement the work of schools, with clear communication being highlighted throughout the responses.

Respondents were keen to know more about what was available, with some suggesting that a centralised portal giving an overview of collections held by different museums along with online resources and content would be very welcome. They also mentioned live information sessions for teachers, and a listing of contact points for museums who can reach out and help them take full advantage of the resources on offer.

Areas of focus mentioned more than once not only included online certified CPD for teachers, linking resources to the JC/LC syllabus, and further support of Leaving Cert and Transition year students, but also specific themed topics.

A number of respondents requested user-friendly live interactions with a guide/expert/curator such as `ask an expert` or `behind the scenes` sessions which could cover topics such as restoration, museum lighting, curation, `day in the life` and so forth; the process behind exhibition-making and museum work. Also noted were deep delves into selected artefacts from the collections, presented in both high- and low-tech ways.

Some commentators mentioned that their students were experiencing online fatigue and valued some physical resources, specifically mentioning newspaper supplements, printed material, or email exchanges.

Highly differentiated activities for learning styles and abilities rather than class/age group and accessibility of same were requested with several respondents asking museums to further consider children with special needs or literacy difficulties when preparing resources that they will receive: *"It's not nice for a 4th class child to read senior infants on their sheet"*. They highlighted that there is a great shortage of 'hi-lo' materials (high interest, low reading age) i.e. simple but relevant materials for older children.

It was clear from the comments that many respondents valued school-museum partnerships and were keen to develop these further, whether online or in person once restrictions lift.

Key Recommendations

Bolstering the museum's educational remit through recognition and support will be pivotal in securing enhanced services and supporting the role museums play under the Creative Ireland Alignment Plan (September 2017), the NI Museums Policy and draft programmes for government in both jurisdictions.

Primary recommendations arising from the survey include:

- Development of a dedicated portal that links educators and museums working in all disciplines (humanities, sciences, etc), enabling and promoting engagement between these and presenting an overview of resources while bolstering access and participation.

- Increased engagement with existing education – arts portals and schemes (such as the *Arts in Education Portal* and the *Arts in Education Charter*) and C2K, the schools digital learning support portal, to amplify museum activity and offerings.

- Investment in the roll out of online learning in the classroom by museums through the establishment or enhancement of formal links with the Department of Education/Education Authority in each jurisdiction, including coordinators for post-primary, especially at Junior Cert and GCSE level, and the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA).

- Encouragement of collaborative doctoral awards between academia and museums that recognise collections as integral components of research infrastructure which can provide insight and data into classroom discussions around climate change, mental health and wellbeing, and political and social challenges.

- Investment in online delivery infrastructure for museums, particularly at regional level: consistency of dedicated websites, enhanced digitisation and virtual resources

Survey responses additionally suggest the following implementable actions by individual museums or museum partnerships:

- Enhanced communication in advance of the school-museum activity: dedicated contact person, information in advance of the visit that can be circulated to parents, live information sessions for teachers.

- Joined up presentations of resources for teachers organised by theme or topic, drawing from a range of collections.

- Improved range of material to suit different learning styles and abilities

- Presentations of 'behind the scenes' material: engage students in the 'process' of interpreting our cultural heritage.

- Increased offering of CPD sessions for teachers

Acknowledgments

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