

THE IMPACT OF CUTS ON UK MUSEUMS

July 2011

A report for the Museums Association
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) of October 2010 resulted in museums of all types having to face up to large scale budget reductions. Many national museums have had a uniform cut of 15%, whilst local authority and independent museums have been affected to varying degrees, depending on the willingness of local government to maintain their funding.

58% of all respondents to the Museums Association's survey reported a reduction to their overall budget. Unsurprisingly, then, the results presented here give an impression of a sector that has had to implement many changes over the past nine months. For example:

- over half of museums represented in the survey have reduced staffing levels
- 29% have decreased the number of events, activities and outreach services that they offer
- nearly a quarter have reduced opening hours.

Of the respondents, 20% have been subject to deep budget cuts, in excess of 25%, which have had a severe impact on services (see section 3). Of those cut to this degree, since April 2010:

- 86% have cut staff
- half have reduced their opening hours
- over 60% have reduced their public events offering.

The CSR means that further cuts will continue to be made over the next three years; this report shows that severe cuts, as have already been experienced by a fifth of respondents, cannot be made without seriously impacting upon front line public services.

This report places museums and their experiences of the cuts within a wider national context and raises awareness of the impact of the cuts. In a period of stress for the sector, it gives cause for reflection on the future of UK museums.

INTRODUCTION

Since October 2010, there has been considerable anecdotal evidence that cuts to public funding have inflicted serious damage on the UK museums sector. Individual museums report closures, staff losses and service reduction up and down the country; however there is no clear and comprehensive picture of the overall health of the sector. This report sets out to provide such a picture.

In May and June this year the Museums Association (MA) asked museum staff to provide information regarding changes to their budgets, staffing, operations and general service provision. They were requested to compare current museum performance with that of April 2010. The qualitative and quantitative data reproduced here is representative of museums from across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as of local, national, independent, military and university institutions of all sizes.

161 individuals responded to the survey, representing 140 museums services responsible for a total of 200 separate sites. The body of respondents is representative of the UK sector, being well-balanced regionally and by type and size of museum service.

In the report, **Section 1** offers a broad overview of the sector, analysing information from the entire body of survey respondents. **Section 2** concentrates on all museums that have experienced a budget cut since April 2010, and **Section 3** focuses on organisations that have received a budget cut in excess of 25%. **Section 4** offers

Museums in sample by region-nation/type

Region-nation/type	Local authority	National	Independent	Other (Military/ University)	Total
Northern England*	12	4	10	7	33
Central England**	18	0	10	1	29
Southern England*** and London	26	1	17	10	54
Scotland	9	1	5	0	15
Wales	4	1	2	1	8
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	1	1
Total	69	7	44	20	140

predominantly qualitative data, giving an overview of moods and opinions amongst respondents. The appendix to the report is published in a separate document and comprises raw data regarding the report's key areas of concern – budgets, staffing and service provision. This is presented in various forms – arranged so that information regarding museums from different regions/nations, and of different types and sizes, may be easily accessed.

*North East, North West and Yorkshire.

** East of England, East and West Midlands.

***South East and South West.

SECTION 1: KEY FINDINGS FROM ALL RESPONDENTS

The following data highlights key findings, looking at the entire body of respondents. In later sections we discuss those museums that have experienced budget cuts as a separate group.

i. Overview

82 organisations, 58% of respondents, have experienced a cut to their overall budget in the past year. 28 museums (20%) experienced a cut of more than a quarter.

Fig.1.1 - Changes to overall budget for 2011/12

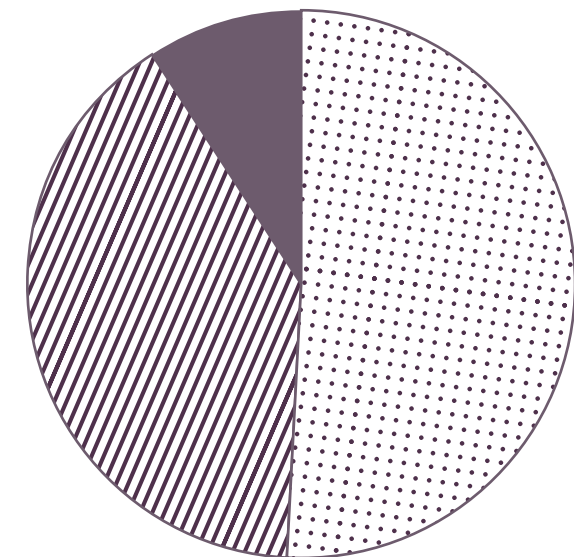
% of change to budget	25%+ decrease	10-24% decrease	5-9% decrease	1-4% decrease	Same	1-4% increase	5-9% increase	10%+ increase
Total number of respondents	28	23	15	16	52	3	1	2
%	20	16	11	11	37	2	1	2

58% of museums have experienced a reduction to their overall budget since April 2010.

ii. Staffing

We asked respondents to compare their current levels of Full Time Equivalent staff with that of April 2010. Fig. 1.2 shows that over half of respondents (51%) have reduced the number of Full Time Equivalent staff in employment compared with April last year.

Fig.1.2 - Changes to Full Time Equivalent Staff as compared with April 2010



cut: 51% no cut: 40% increase: 9%

"We have lost our education officer post so can no longer offer all the activities for schools... which we once did"

Curator - a local authority museum in the West Midlands

SECTION 1: KEY FINDINGS FROM ALL RESPONDENTS CONTINUED

iii. Service provision

The statistics relating to service provision give a more mixed picture. 71% of all respondents are either maintaining or increasing the number of events on offer, giving the impression that performance in this area is strong. However, 22% of all respondents report a reduction in museum opening hours and many individuals are pessimistic; 46% believe that the quality of service their organisation provides will decrease over the next year. This negativity is perhaps explained when we look specifically at the data provided by those museums that have experienced a cut (see Section 2).

"The main concern is that the visitor experience will be affected by staffing cuts and that the quality of the museum is detrimentally affected"

Manager – a national museum in Scotland

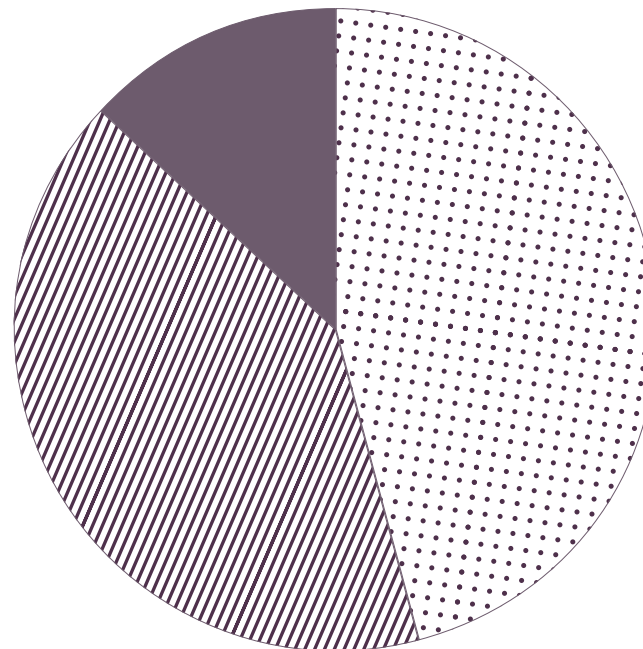
22% of museums have reduced their opening hours compared with April 2010.

Fig1.3 - Changes to quality of service provided by museums in the coming year

Respondents were asked the following question:

"As a result of the cuts, looking ahead to the coming year, do you personally feel that the quality of service provided by your museum will increase, decrease or stay the same?"

■ decrease: 46%
▨ same: 41%
■ increase: 13%



46% believe that the quality of service their organisation provides will decrease over the next year.

SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS FROM MUSEUMS FACING BUDGET CUTS

In this section we present a breakdown of the changes implemented by the 82 museums in the sample that have experienced cuts to their overall budget. Amongst these museums there are 24 multi-site services; this takes the total number of museums affected by cuts to 142 (71% of the 200 separate museum sites).

i) Overview

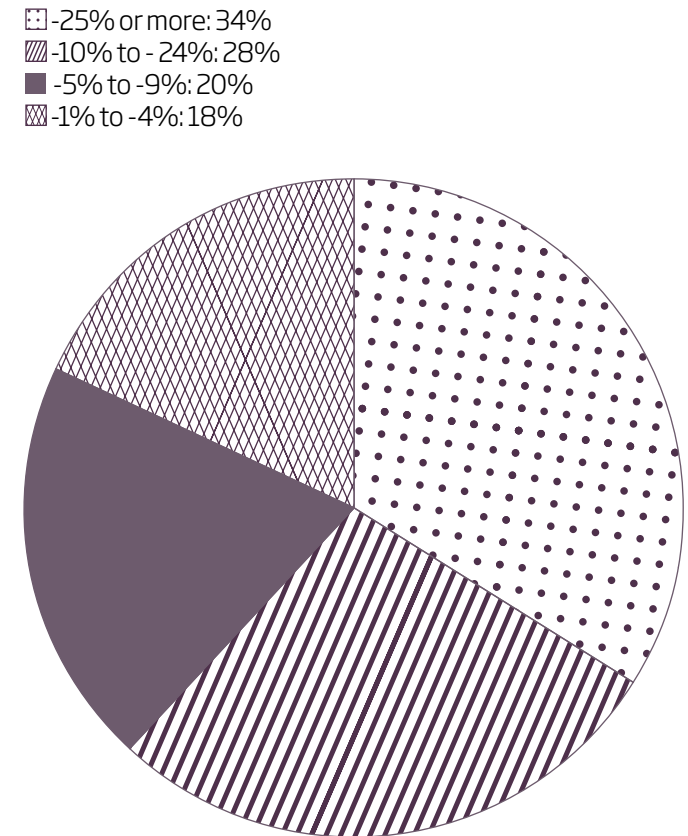
No single type of museum has been immune to the cuts. As Fig. 2.1 shows, more local authority museums have been affected, but 15 out of 44 (34%) of the independent museums that responded to the survey have also been hit by reductions to their budgets.

Fig.2.2 shows the varying degrees of cuts experienced by those museums facing reductions to their budget. A third of museums that have faced a cut have received a budget reduction of 25% or more. Over a quarter have been cut by between 10 -24% and nearly two thirds have received a cut of 10% or more.

Fig.2.1 - Museums facing budget cuts by type

	Local authority	National	Independent	Other (Military/ University)
Total no. respondents	69	7	44	20
Total facing a cut	50	6	15	11
%	72.5	85.7	34.1	55

Fig.2.2 - Size of budget cuts



SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS FROM MUSEUMS FACING BUDGET CUTS CONTINUED

ii. Staffing

73% of museums that have had their budget cut have reduced the number of Full Time Equivalent staff in employment.

Fig.2.3 -Changes in cut museums to Full Time Equivalent staff levels compared with April 2010

■ staff cuts: 73%
▨ no staff cuts: 22%
■ staff increase: 5%

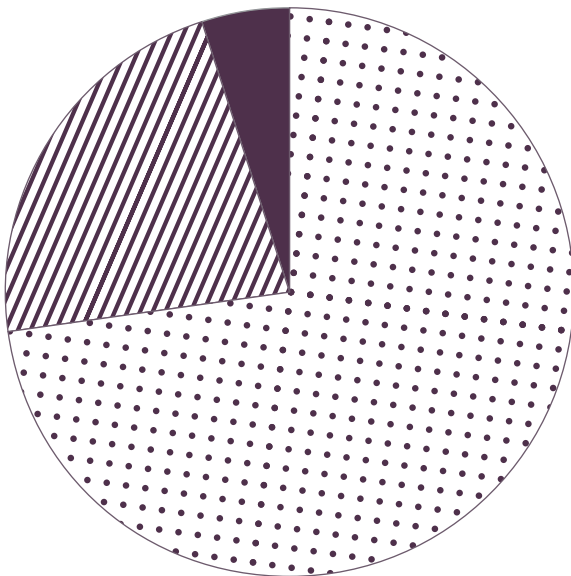
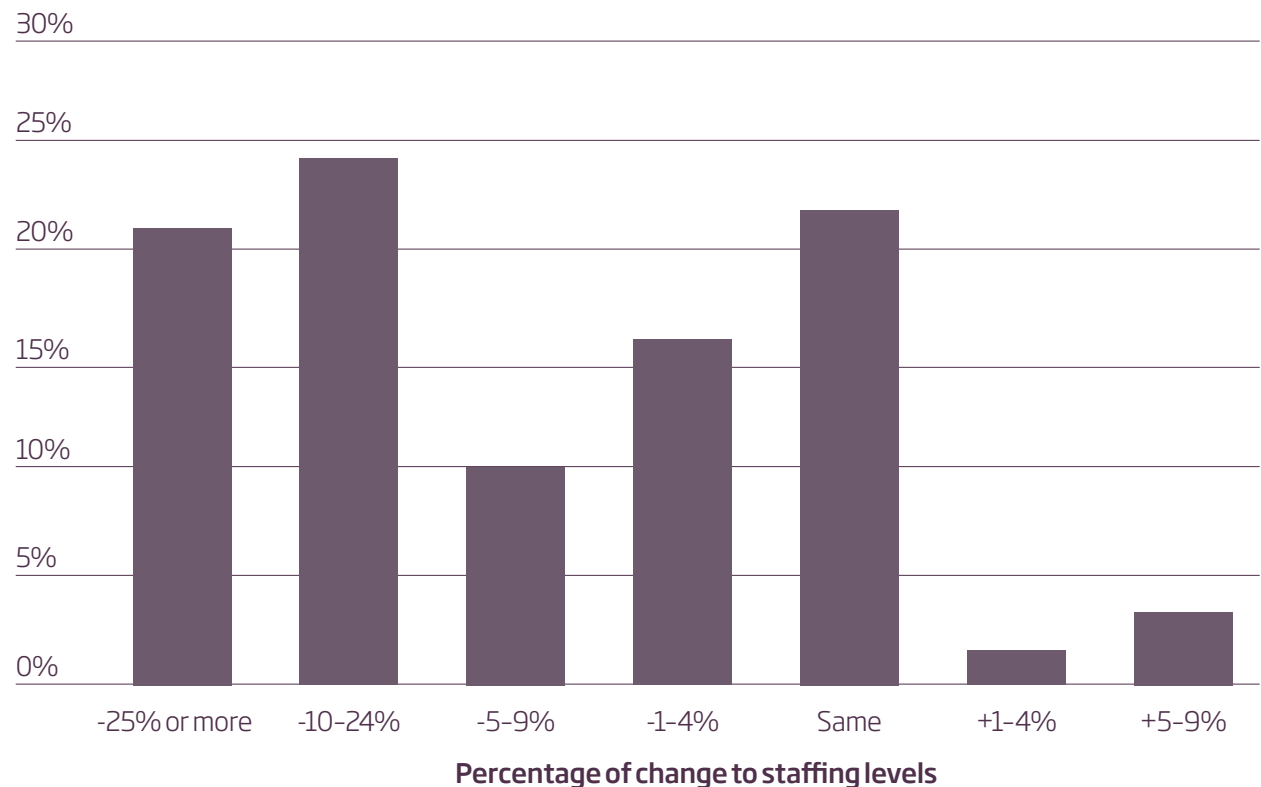


Fig.2.4 shows the degrees to which staff levels have changed for museums facing a budget cut compared with April 2010. 45% have reduced staff by more than 10%; more than 20% have cut by over a quarter.

73% of cut museums have reduced staff levels compared with April 2010.

Fig.2.4 -Degree of staff change in cut museums



SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS FROM MUSEUMS FACING BUDGET CUTS CONTINUED

We asked respondents to identify all of the areas in which staff cuts had been made in their museum. Fig.2.5 clearly shows that curatorial, education, and visitor services departments have been the most affected by staff cuts. Over half of the museums facing a budget reduction had cut staff in these areas.

Regarding the issue of volunteering, respondents were asked the following question:
“Of your museum’s total workforce, do volunteers now constitute a smaller proportion, the same proportion, or a larger proportion?”

Fig.2.5 - Areas of staff cuts in cut museums



Of museums facing a budget cut, nearly half were found to have a larger proportion of volunteers within their total workforce compared with April 2010.

There is a marked trend for museums to take on higher levels of volunteers. This is a trend which has drawn substantial comment from our body of respondents, many of whom feel that, with a view to the long term, the wrong decisions regarding staffing have been made.

“If volunteers are taken on to make up for the shortfall in staffing, low morale and alienation of the permanent staff will occur”

Gallery Assistant – a local authority museum in Scotland

Fig.2.6 - Volunteer levels as a proportion of total workforce in cut museums

	Smaller proportion	Same proportion	Larger proportion
Total	14	72	78
% of Total	8.5	43.9	47.6

Almost 60% of cut museums have experienced staff losses in curatorial, education and visitor services departments.

SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS FROM MUSEUMS FACING BUDGET CUTS CONTINUED

iii. Service provision

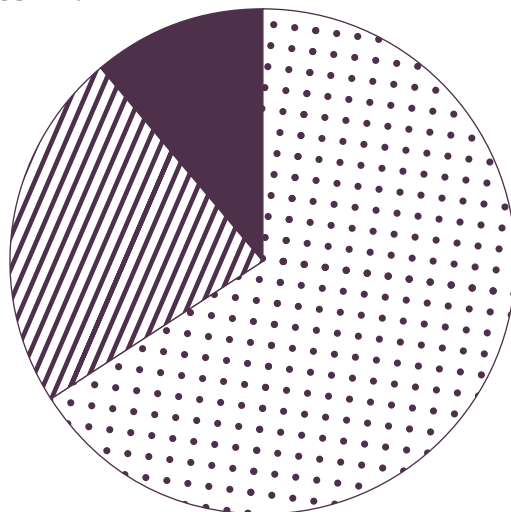
Of museums facing budget cuts, 34% are decreasing their opening hours and 44% are decreasing the number of events, activities and outreach services they provide. These results demonstrate the serious impact of cuts on service provision across the sector.

Fig.2.7 shows results from the group of respondents that have faced a budget reduction when asked:

“As a result of the cuts, looking ahead to the coming year, do you personally feel that the quality of service provided by your museum will increase, decrease or stay the same?”

Fig.2.7 - Quality of service provided by cut museums in the coming year

■ decrease: 66%
 ▨ same: 23%
 ■ increase: 11%



Respondents highlighted areas of particular concern regarding reduction of quality over the next year. Figure 2.8 shows that:

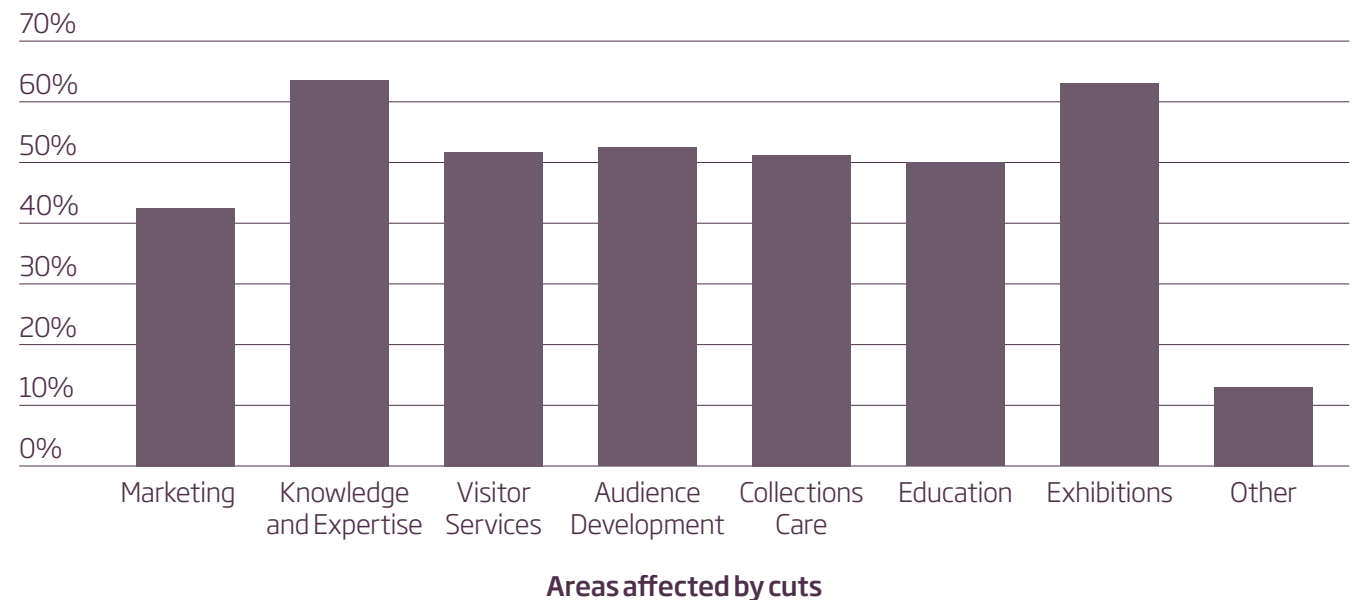
- 65% of cut museums said that knowledge and expertise would suffer
- 63% said that the quality of exhibitions would be reduced
- over 50% claimed that audience development, collections care, visitor services and education would be negatively affected by the cuts.

These figures mirror the areas of staff losses shown by Fig.2.5, with the heaviest losses being curatorial, education and visitor services posts. Respondents have made clear that heavy staff losses will have a severe impact on the quality of service provision.

“Museums are fixed cost operations and cuts in grant/expenditure will therefore force the loss of staff – the only ‘flexible’ resource. Exhibitions will turn from quality products into something akin to a WI display”

Director – a large independent museum in the South West

Fig.2.8 - Quality of service provided by cut museums in the coming year

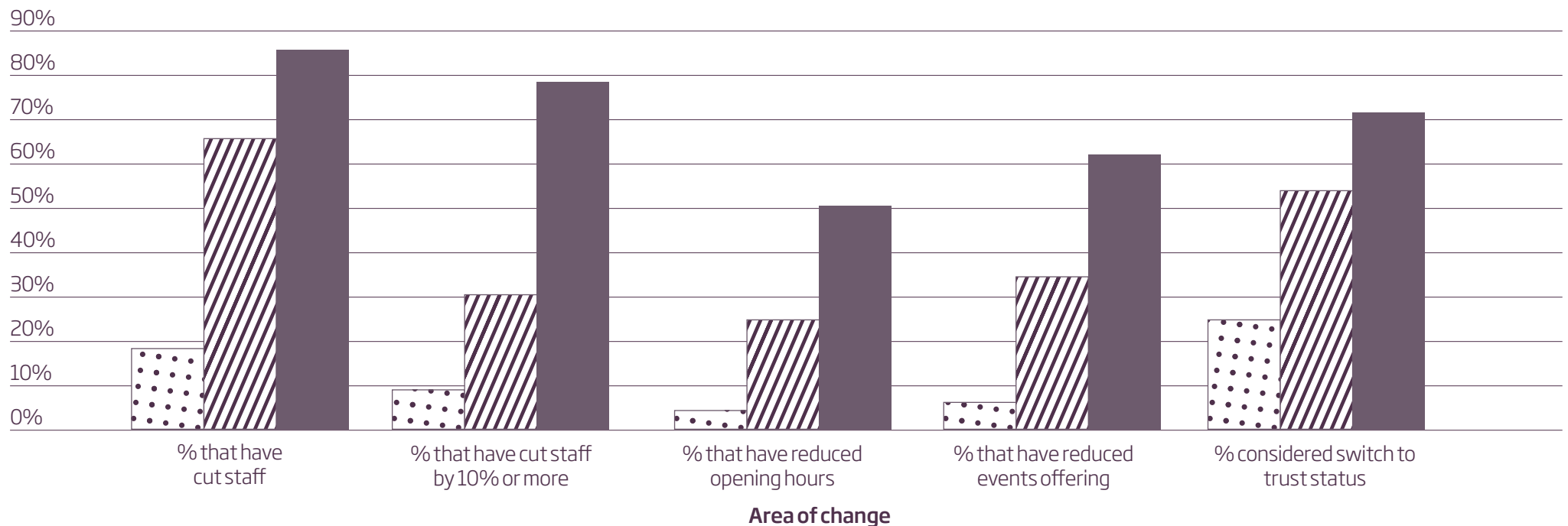


SECTION 3: THE WORST CUT: MUSEUMS WITH BUDGET CUTS OF 25% OR MORE

The table below emphasises the devastating impact that cuts of 25% or more have had upon one fifth of our sample. 28 out of the 140 museums we surveyed have had to reduce costs by more than a quarter; the data below demonstrates that these museums are faring considerably worse than organisations facing lesser cuts.

Fig. 2.9: Staffing and service provision at Museums cut by 25% or more - comparison with other cut museums/museums with no cut.

■ museums with no cut
▨ museums cut by less than 25%
■ museums cut by 25% or more



Of museums cut by 25% or more:
86% have reduced staff;
50% have reduced opening hours;
61% now offer fewer events.

SECTION 3: THE WORST CUT: MUSEUMS WITH BUDGET CUTS OF 25% OR MORE

Deep cuts have a serious impact on museums' public service provision. Museums that have faced a cut of 25% or more are twice as likely to be reducing opening hours as museums facing lesser cuts; they are nearly three times as likely to be making staff cuts in excess of 10%.

The following are comments made by respondents whose organisations had experienced a cut to their budget of more than a quarter. They demonstrate real concern for the ability of the worst cut museums to keep doors open and maintain service levels in the current economic climate.

"It is now a zombie museum..."

Former curator of a local authority museum in the South West

"The decisions have been short-sighted, knee-jerk reactions, panicking to meet the cuts required by councillors. After the three-year period within which the cuts are required, they will sit back and look at the ragged tatters of what had been a growing and enthusiastic museum service, and the tired, cynical staff within it, and perhaps regret their hasty and ill-informed decisions."

Museum designer - a local authority museum in the West Midlands

"Cuts have been made without a knowledge or understanding of services and without undertaking consultation with staff who could have identified savings which would have had less impact upon the delivery and long term viability of services."

Curator - a local authority museums service in the West Midlands

"The Council has taken the decision to close the museum and pack up the collections to move to alternative storage as a way to 'save' money. In reality, the funding cuts have been the perfect opportunity to finally close an old museum that needed money spending on it to refurbish and repair the fabric of the building."

Collections manager - a local authority museum in the North West

"Year on year cuts are now causing alarm bells to ring. Jobs are under threat, which will impact on the visitor service received."

Manager - a local authority museum in the North West.

One fifth of organisations surveyed report cuts in excess of 25%.

SECTION 4: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

i. Pragmatic optimism

Moving our focus away from the worst affected museums considered in Section 3, approximately 10% of respondents feel that the changes enforced by cuts were overdue and have been, in part at least, beneficial.

"I do not think that the changes could have been avoided. Service has to become 'smaller but better'."

Museum and Gallery Manager- a local authority museum in Yorkshire

"Beneficially, it has made us reconsider what we offer for visitors and attempt to improve our museums and what they offer. It has also led to us charging for events and some activities - a good way of making sure we are tracking visitor figures and also preventing staff from wasting time on events/activities which are then not popular."

Education officer - a local authority museum in Scotland

"Staffing changes have taken advantage of vacant posts so a new structure is not quite what we would have invented from scratch but we now have a more efficient and leaner service [...] The change is to be applauded in removing archaic working practices and lack of flexibility in opening hours."

Principal officer- a local authority museum in the West Midlands

"[The cuts are] being used as a means to bring about constructive change and a positive dialogue..."

Museum manager - a local authority museum in the South East

"Renaissance and local authority largesse has made too many institutions profligate."

Curator - an independent museum in the North West

"The future for the museum is uncertain but it is supported by people who do not want it to fail. These people are the ones who are driving new projects forward in the hope it will help the museum survive into the future."

Curator - an independent museum in the East of England

ii. More haste, less speed

The findings set out in this report give a clear indication of the challenges facing UK museums as a result of the cuts. However, quantitative data fails to reveal the further damage wrought by a timetable for cuts, which gave funding bodies mere months to achieve vast spending reductions. Many individuals praise local authorities and museum managers for their sophisticated handling of an unavoidable problem, yet others feel that cuts have been rushed through without due consideration. A substantial body of respondents have expressed dismay at the haphazard manner in which cuts have been implemented.

"The council made these cuts without public consultation and rushed them through from January to meet last year's financial year deadline."

Heritage team leader - a local authority museum in the South West

"An external consultant was brought in to restructure us who was not a museum professional, who had not even visited the museum until his last day".

Assistant curator - a museums service in Yorkshire

SECTION 4: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE CONTINUED

"I think the board have made a very sensible decision based on poor levels of information from our local authority[...]. We did not have confirmation of a 33% cut this year until mid-March, 15 days before the beginning of the financial year. God knows what's going to happen next year."

Director – an independent museum in Scotland

"The consultation period was a farce; our union agreed it was bordering on illegal. Short term decisions made by our museum manager will undermine the museum - our new mantra of 'Full Cost Recovery' does not equate to specialist expertise, excellence or meaningful outreach."

Assistant curator – a local authority museum in the South West

"Considerable time was spent on discussing how to implement cuts and increase efficiency with minimum effect on service and limiting the effect on front of house casual staff."

Curator – a local authority museum in Yorkshire

iii. Trust status

With just under half of local authority museums surveyed looking at trust status, there is a degree of uncertainty in the sector on the subject of trusts. Many museum staff feel under-informed about the implications of adopting trust status and question the long term viability of change.

"There will need to be fewer publically funded museums in 5 years time; there is a grave danger of spates of non-viable trusts being set up to fail."

Head of museums and galleries – a museum service in Yorkshire

"Trust status is being considered, as is a model that would group the museum with sports and leisure facilities in the county. This is alarming for the future of the museum, as services and quality would suffer."

Manager – a local authority museum in the North East

I think going to trust may be a good option, but will change all our jobs and will make us think more in business terms - something which I don't think we're ready for at the moment. I think extensive training on how to look at your museum like a business is much needed!"

Education officer – a local authority museum in Scotland

48% of local authority museums surveyed are considering or already implementing a move to trust status.

SECTION 4: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE CONTINUED

iv. Uncertainty reigns

26% of respondents to the survey indicated that, either:

- they are uncertain as to how cuts that their museum has already received will be implemented
- they expect to receive a cut, or further cut, but have yet to be given details
- they are uncertain about the future of their organisation in general.

This figure – reached by compiling and analysing the qualitative data provided by survey respondents – frames the larger body of results presented above, and underlines the difficulties facing museum staff, who must plan for the future with limited information to guide them.

"[...] minimal reductions until a decision on trust status has been made by our local authority. While this means we are not being cut at the moment, the service is stagnating as people try and predict what the outcome will be. There is no long term planning around staffing, exhibitions or museum development."

Collections manager – a local authority museum in the South West

"I expect there to be an impact within the next two years but as yet timescales are still unclear because of a lack of clarity in the overall political picture."

Development manager – a local authority museum in Scotland

"At the moment things are staying the same. We are anticipating degradation in quality and are planning to increase the number of volunteers when we know what the situation will be."

Curator – a military museum in the South East

"At present the cuts have not greatly affected us but we feel they will in the next couple of years. If staff leave they will not be replaced."

Curator – a university museum in Wales

"There is still I feel a degree of uncertainty [...] If more cuts were to happen [...] there would be a distinct top heaviness to management – too many chiefs not enough Indians. Undermining the specialists' skills, knowledge base and expertise will over time have a detrimental effect and a loss of dynamism. There will be a veneer but no depth."

Curator – a large local authority museum in London

"We are in the early stages of phased cuts which if fully implemented will reduce our budget by 60% and the museum will no longer be a viable service"

Curator – a local authority museum in the East of England

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The appendix to this report is available for download at:
www.museumsassociation.org/reportappendix