



MINTING THE FUTURE:

Visitor experiences in mints, museums and galleries.

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

HANNAH WEBB

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1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Fellow, Hannah Webb would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organisations for their support and generosity throughout the duration of the Fellowship:

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The Fellow sincerely thanks The George Alexander Foundation for providing funding support for the ISS Institute and for this Fellowship. In 1972, George Alexander AM (1910 - 2008) set up an independent philanthropic Foundation as a way of sharing his wealth and giving back to the community. Today, the focus of The George Alexander Foundation is access to education for promising young people, particularly students with financial need and those from rural and remote areas.

The George Alexander Foundation (GAF) Scholarship and Fellowship Programs form the core of the foundation's work, operating in partnership with major tertiary institutions, while our Fellowships and other Education grants provide a variety of other unique and challenging educational experiences. George Alexander believed in the notion of 'planting seeds and hoping they grow into pretty big trees.' The programs supported by the Foundation endeavour to support this ideal and as GAF students graduate and go on to contribute to the community, George's legacy and spirit lives on through their achievements. George Alexander came to Australia as a child migrant, and went on to become a mechanic, an entrepreneur and a businessman and later, a generous philanthropist, who held that you do not own the possessions you have, 'you're just minding them'. This philosophy guided him to give during his lifetime and to hope that through his example, he might inspire others to do the same.

Royal Australian Mint

The Fellow would like to thank the following Royal Australian Mint staff for their support of her Fellowship:

- » Ross MacDiarmid, Chief Executive Officer
- » Mark Cartwright, Executive General Manager Marketing, Sales and Innovation
- » Kate Landford-Morris, Education and Visitor Services Manager

- » Samantha Rutter, previous Education and Visitor Services Manager
- » Holly Anderson, Collections and Public Programs Manager

The Royal Mint, Llantrisant

- » Abigail Kenvyn, Exhibitions Manager, Royal Mint Museum
- » Amy Williams, Education Manager, Royal Mint Museum
- » Dr Kevin Clancy, Director of the Royal Mint Museum
- » Sarah Tyley, Collections Manager, Royal Mint Museum
- » Graham Dwyer, Senior Research Curator, Royal Mint Museum
- » Chris Barker, Information and Research Manager, Royal Mint Museum

The British Museum

- » Philip Atwood, Keeper of Coins and Medals
- » Henry Flynn, Money and Medals Project Curator

The Horniman Museum and Gardens

- » Tim Corrum, Director of Curatorial and Public Engagement
- » Julie Baxter, Personal Assistant to Tim Corrum
- » Oliver Whitehead, Creative Producer

La Monnaie de Paris

- » Bibiane de Pampelonne, Chargee de l'action Culturelle
- » Célia Fourquay, Chargee de projets multimedia
- » Anne-Sophie Duroyon-Chavanne, Administrateur
- » Stéphanie Molinard, Responsable de la Médiation et des Publications
- » Laurence Mongin, Chargée de contenus pédagogiques

Museo Casa de la Moneda

- » Montserrat Carmona Vidal, Head of Exhibitions and Activities
- » Jose Luis Orozco Santiago, Sales Executive, Real Casa de la Moneda
- » Rafael Feria Perez, Museum Director

The Fellow would also like to acknowledge Craig Middleton (2017 George Alexander Foundation Fellow) for his support and guidance throughout the entire Fellowship process.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background:

There is only one federally operated Mint in Australia that produces circulating coins, the Royal Australian Mint (RAM). RAM, therefore, is a unique institution within Australia and shares a very particular story. The associated museum, and broader visitor experience, is part of the same institution that operates a factory as part of its core business. This alone presents a whole set of unique challenges for the institution. The Fellow identified that internationally, there are other mint museums operating in similar contexts, and that it would be of integral value to study their operations in order to understand how they apply museum best practice within their institutions. Additionally, the Fellow aimed to investigate how mints, generally, have a shifting role – that is their role as cultural institutions, and not just factories. This is important for the sustainability of these institutions, facing a world in which the use of tangible currency is declining.

Placing the visitor and their needs and expectations at the heart of an ‘experience’ is fundamental to the long-term viability of the museum industry. Additionally, with so many emerging digital and interactive trends,¹ the revitalisation of museums is something that should be innovative and contemporary. Museums should look to innovative ways to tell their stories and educate the wider community for generations to come.

The key objectives of the Fellowship were to identify new approaches to visitor experiences with an emphasis on accessibility, education and innovation. It aimed to explore how different approaches can improve the innovative quality and relevance of mints, so that they hold interest for communities for generations to come (as well as museums in a broader Australian context).

The Fellow investigated how museums can enhance the following:

1. Visitor experiences: this included the investigation of public programs, exhibitions, tours, digital experiences and outreach.
2. Accessibility: investigating how different methods can make facilities accessible to a variety of visitors through physical access, interpretation, audio and visual technologies.
3. Education: observing how different methods used by education staff can produce innovative and creative programs to engage students.
4. Relevance of content: observing the ways in which museums can interpret collections to ensure that they remain relevant and purposeful in a modern context. This directly relates to RAM and the threats posed by the decline in the use of coins in our society.

¹ Kwasi Hope Agyeman, "Top 10 Museum Trends You Should Know," Museum Tech Trends, March 29, 2020, <https://medium.com/museum-tech-trends>

The Fellow visited the following cultural institutions from January 2020 to February 2020:

- » The Royal Mint
- » The British Museum (BM)
- » The Horniman Museum and Gardens
- » La Monnaie de Paris
- » Museo Casa de la Moneda

At the time of writing this report the Fellow is employed as the Public Programs Officer in the Education and Visitor Services Team at the Royal Australian Mint and holds an Honours degree in Art History & Curatorship from the Australian National University, Canberra.



Hannah Webb at the Royal Australian Mint

Fellowship learning's

Major learning's from the Fellowship were concentrated around the creation of visitor experiences including:

- » Creation of programs and exhibitions.
- » Expectations of visitors that there will be digital experiences.
- » Importance of accessibility.
- » Innovation in education programs and
- » Methods of keeping museums and their collections relevant to modern society.

The Fellow was able to investigate each of these areas in-depth, discovering different approaches institutions' took to ensure that their visitors were engaged with their content and stories.

Personal, professional and sectoral impact:

The Fellow looks forward to utilising the skills and knowledge gained during the Fellowship to develop their career, and to generate positive and innovative change in the approach to visitor experiences.

The Fellow will be able to use these skills to initiate discussions about international best practice in exhibitions, programming, education, digital experiences, accessibility and innovative displays and interpretation of content.

Considerations and recommendations:

The Fellow has been able to establish interesting recommendations as a result of the Fellowship learning's, grounded in both mint museums and broader museum and gallery contexts. These recommendations touch upon the following:

- » Creation of visitor experiences.
- » The place of technology.
- » Interactivity and education.
- » Accessibility and consultation.
- » How you define and project your 'social role.'
- » Contemporary exhibitions.
- » Quantifying success.
- » The role of commercialisation.
- » International networks in both the minting and museum industry.

The Fellow will share these recommendations within their current circle of networks, as well as the newly established international network of practitioners working in both mint and other museums that the Fellow has established post her Fellowship travel.

The findings will also be shared with their colleagues at the Royal Australian Mint and through their networks in the Australian Museum and Galleries Association (AMaGA), in order to initiate discussions about new ideas and implementing change.

3. FELLOWSHIP BACKGROUND

Fellowship context

Visitor experience:

In Australia, there is only one federally operated Mint that provides a visitor experience offering. The Royal Australian Mint (RAM) currently welcomes over 350,000 visitors a year, with approximately 60,000 of these visitors comprised of school students. Currently, there is a lack of research investigating the roles of museums which operate in a commercial context, such as RAM, including the challenges and opportunities of operating in this environment. Coins directly reflect our cultural heritage, and the ways that mints share stories through innovative programming and visitor experiences will become increasingly important to Australia's heritage as the use of circulating coins declines.

With an estimated contribution of \$10.1 billion into the Australian economy, arts, culture and the heritage sector have an extremely important and ongoing role to play in Australia.² This demonstrates both the educational and economic benefit of investing in our visitor experiences in Australian museums, drawing on international innovation and best practice to do so.



Visitors at the Royal Australian Mint (image courtesy of RAM)

Accessibility & Education:

It must be acknowledged that whilst it's important to create innovative programs, this programming must be executed with full consideration of individual and collective accessibility requirements. Currently, there is a growing and pertinent dialogue in the museum sector to initiate change and innovation regarding diversity within museums and galleries. Approaches to learning and the importance of school visitation is also a current point of focus within Australian museums and galleries. In the 2018-2019 financial year, the Royal Australian Mint welcomed over 60,000 school students to their visitor gallery. Considering this, the Fellow identified that measures for best practice in accessibility and education should be looked at from an international perspective, given the varying approaches to topics and what can be defined as 'best practice'.



Group at La Monnaie de Paris (Salle de la Manufacture : © Bruno Weiss | ENSA Paris-Malaquais)

Relevance of content:

Concurrent to the increased visitation of 355,135 to the Royal Australian Mint in the 18-19 financial year, internationally, there is a gradual decline in coin use which is projected to rapidly increase in the next 20 years. This shift in the universal use of coins puts mints in challenging, yet not unexpected positions, where they are required to consider the community relevance of their institutions in a new space. It calls for consideration as to how they can continue telling the important stories of a nation not only through their coins, but also their museum or visitor experiences. Given that the Royal Australian Mint is the sole producer of Australian decimal currency coins, the Fellow identified this area could only be investigated comparatively within an international context.

Fellowship methodology

The Fellow visited mints and museums across Europe and the United Kingdom to investigate best practice in, and approaches to, visitor experiences, including challenges and opportunities.

The Fellow engaged with the institutions through a variety of methods including:

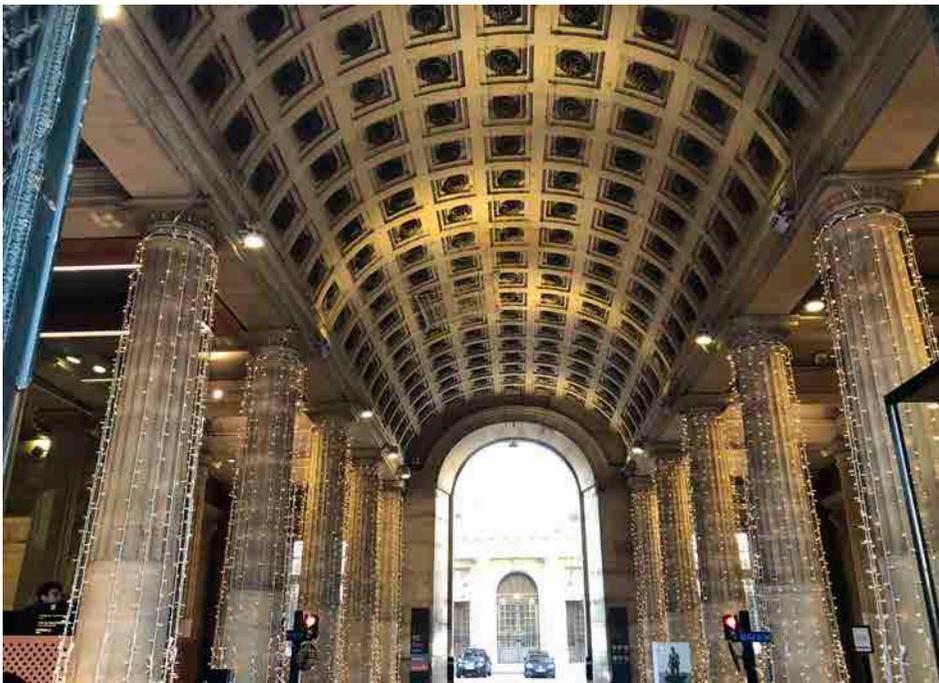
- » Tours of facilities, including the visitor space and collection storage
- » Observing and assisting with both public and education programs
- » Formal and informal meetings with key stakeholders in the visitor experience and museum teams

This approach allowed the Fellow to observe the visitor experiences from multiple perspectives including general visitors, school groups, teachers and internal stakeholders, including staff who develop and manage programs and experiences, as well as front of house staff who facilitate them. Given the multiple stakeholders involved in any museum or gallery context, this approach was valuable and enabled the Fellow to make informed observations and convert them into learning's that could be taken away from each of the institutions.

Fellowship period

The research for this Fellowship was conducted over a four-week period in January 2020 at the following institutions:

- » The Royal Mint, Llantrisant, United Kingdom.
- » The British Museum, London, United Kingdom.
- » The Horniman Museum and Gardens, London, United Kingdom.
- » La Monnaie de Paris, Paris, France.
- » Museo Casa de la Moneda, Madrid, Spain.



Entrance to La Monnaie de Paris

Fellow biography

At the time of writing this report the Fellow is employed as the Public Programs Officer in the Education and Visitor Services Team at the Royal Australian Mint. She is an emerging museum professional with an interest in public programs, visitor experiences and exhibitions. In her current position, she is responsible for the development and facilitation of programs at RAM, with a focus on innovative experiences and accessibility for all visitors. She also assists with exhibitions and other gallery related events.

In 2014 the Fellow graduated with a Bachelor of Art History and Curatorship (Honours) from the Australian National University. Since graduating, she has curated independent exhibitions and worked and interned at cultural institutions including the Canberra Museum and Gallery and the National Library of Australia. Hannah is also a general committee member of the Australia Museum and Galleries Association Education Network, along with the Emerging Professionals Network.

Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions

Mint: a place where official coins are made

Numismatics: the study and collection of coins and banknotes

Museum: for the purpose of this Fellowship, this term refers to a public space with exhibitions and other visitor experiences relating to their collections

Public programs: gallery related programs which are open to the public, usually with a theme that is topical for an event or exhibition happening at the institution. Public programs can include talks, seminars, children's activities and more

Exhibitions: public displays in museum or galleries, usually related to the core collection of the institution

Accessibility: refers to the accessibility of the visitor experiences in regard to individual physical, learning and sensory requirements

Education programs: refers to programs run in museums that are designed specifically for schools, usually with relevant curriculum links

Visitor experience: refers to the experiences offered by an institution to the visitor. In this context, this can include visitor galleries, exhibitions, public programs and other events

Digital experience: for the purpose of this Fellowship, this term refers to digital technologies used in museums or galleries such as virtual or augmented reality to enhance the visitor experience. It can also include online experiences such as virtual tours

VR: Virtual reality

AR: Augmented reality

RAM: Royal Australian Mint

BM: British Museum

AMaGA: Australian Museum and Galleries Association



'Grand Monnayage' (Grand Monnayage : © Monnaie de Paris | Hermann Vaulogé)

4. FELLOWSHIP LEARNINGS

The Fellow utilised a broad view to investigate and learn about visitor experiences, public programs, exhibitions, digital experiences, accessibility, education and how mint museums keep their collections socially relevant and stimulating. Each institution visited had a different focus and strengths regarding these skill enhancement areas, giving the Fellow an opportunity to explore multiple and different approaches.

Below is a summary of what the Fellow observed at each institution:

The Royal Mint

Whilst at the Royal Mint, the Fellow observed their visitor experience offerings including exhibitions, public and VIP tours as well as school visits. Their exhibition space has a large focus on the telling of stories of the people within their institution in order to connect visitors with both their past and continuing operations (rather than just focusing on minting processes or history).



The Royal Mint Experience



Foyer in the British Museum

The British Museum

At the British Museum, the Fellow had the unique opportunity to observe the collections of the Coins & Medallions Department, speaking with curators and researchers, as well as being introduced to other areas including Conservation and National Partnerships.

The British Museum has a long history of collecting coins and medals, with approximately 800,000 objects in their Coins and Medallions Department collection.³ However, money is something that is increasingly and drastically evolving, and they are looking to maintain their displays in a way that is still relevant and interesting to the modern visitor. There is also a huge emphasis on sharing currency from all over the world and unpacking interesting stories about what currency can tell you about people and their culture.

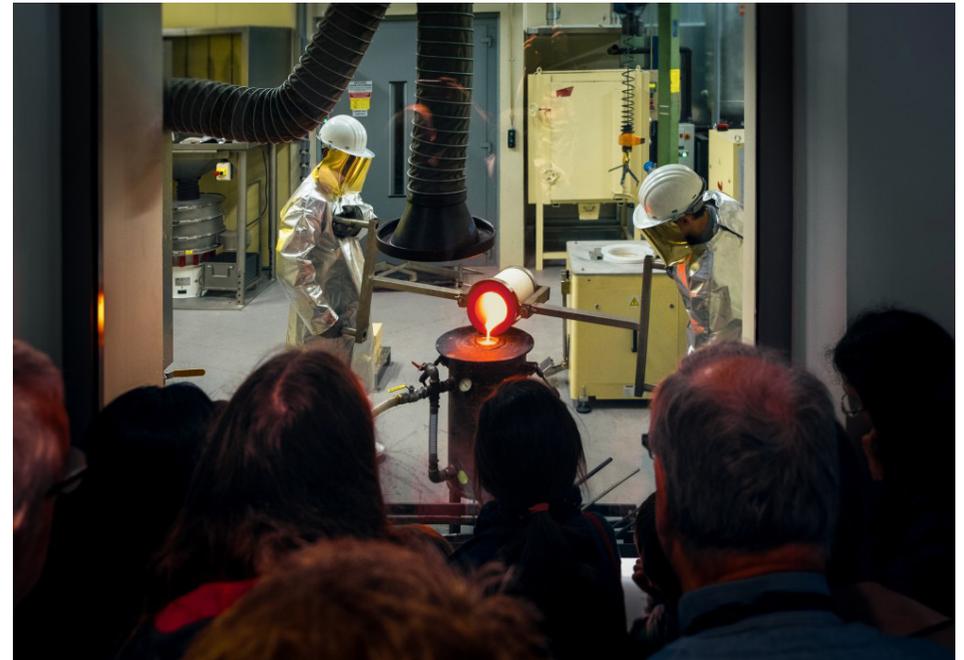
The Horniman Museum and Gardens



Horniman Museum and Gardens

The Horniman Museum and Gardens is a unique establishment in South-East London, that provided the Fellow an opportunity for exposure to a very 'different' sort of public institution and approaches to the visitor experience. The Fellow was able to meet with curators, observe education programs and discuss strategies with their creative producer. The Horniman Museum is working towards a much more inclusive approach to their visitor demographic over the next ten years. Their vision of their role as educators on international matters in a societal context is a driving force behind this, which is apparent in their approach to exhibitions and visitor experiences.

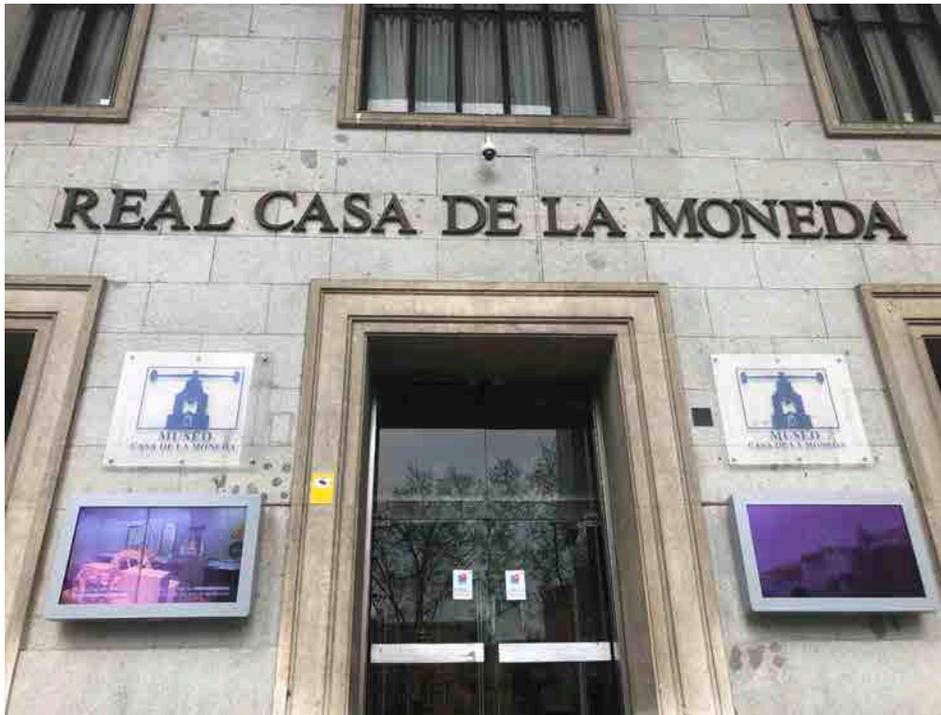
La Monnaie de Paris



Looking into the 'Fonderie' (Fonderie : © Monnaie de Paris | Hermann Vaulogé)

The Fellow was shown a variety of different approaches to the visitor experience at La Monnaie de Paris, including cultural activities, exhibitions, digital experiences and education programs. La Monnaie de Paris has created an innovative perspective to a century's old topic, minting. The Museum, set in the building of one of the oldest institutions in France, has contemporary and digital displays. The displays focus on explaining to members of the public the complex process of creating coins and medals, creating an exciting fusion between the past and present.⁴

Museo Casa de la Moneda



Entrance to Museo Casa de la Moneda

The Museo Casa de la Moneda is a visitor space with a strong focus on the history of coins in Spain. The Fellow had the opportunity to have in-depth tours of the gallery, conversations with curators, to observe education programs, see the installation of a contemporary exhibition and be introduced to other areas of the business. They have begun implementing successful temporary exhibitions as a draw card for visitation, taking a more modern approach to their displays by doing so. Their recent visitation figures have demonstrated that these exhibitions have been a successful drawcard for enticing new visitors.

Visitor Experience – exhibitions, public programs, digital experiences

All the institutions visited had a major focus on the importance of the visitor experiences and putting the visitor at the centre of the museum. Some of the successful programs or strategies which the Fellow identified to be further researched and implemented in an Australian context were:

VIP experiences

VIP experiences are something that visitors are willing to pay for in order to get a 'premium' or 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity. This was proven at the Royal Mint when they introduced weekly VIP Tours allowing a small number of guests to go behind the scenes. Features of the tour include viewing areas that are usually closed to the public including the coin factories and museum collection storerooms. These tours always sell out, despite being priced at a premium in a low socio-economic area.

Temporary exhibitions

There was an on-going theme amongst the institutions visited by the Fellow of using exhibitions as a draw-card for visitation. At La Monnaie de Paris and Museo Casa de la Moneda, the Museums utilised contemporary works, including painting and sculpture installations, to create modern and vibrant exhibitions in spaces that have a strong focus on the past due to the nature of coin collections. Bringing historical themes into the modern era through this artwork increased interest and therefore visitation, adding a dynamic approach to the visitor experience.

For instance, the temporary exhibition at La Monnaie de Paris that the Fellow visited focused on the works of German-born American artist KiKi Smith. The exhibition showcased some of her sculptures and works on paper, drawing links between her use of the different mediums and their associations to the process of minting coins and medallions. Additionally, they also focused on the contemporary

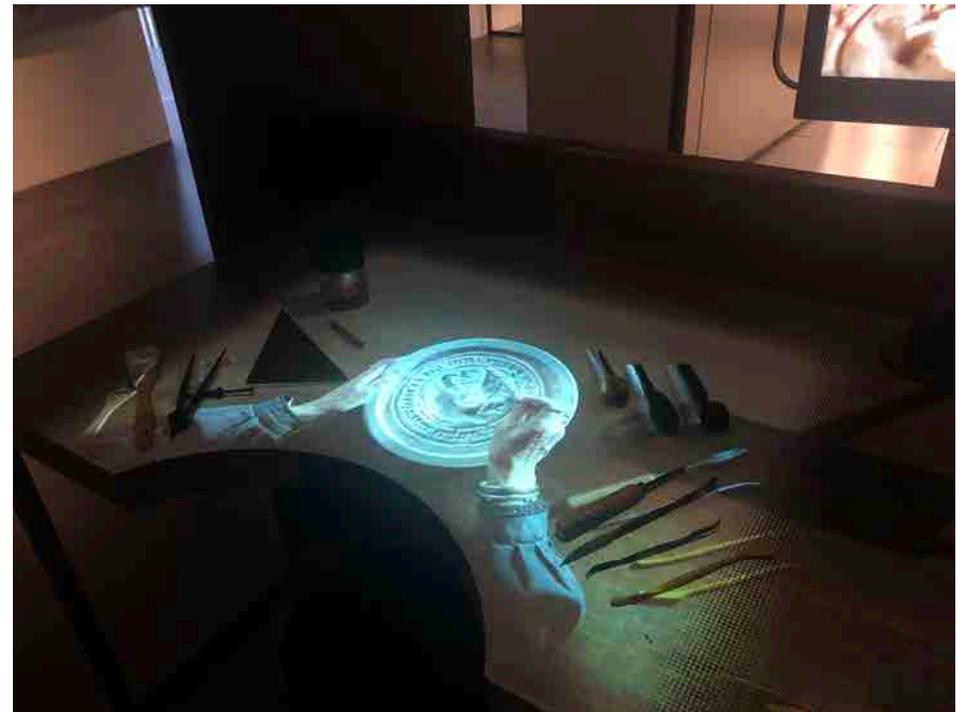
themes of Smith's work, including the human condition and the role of gender, particularly in relation to women.

Digital experiences

When visiting all of the institutions, it was increasingly clear that international 'museum go-ers' expect 'digital experiences' as part of their museum visit.⁵ Museums now attract visitors who are seeking experiences, often ones that they can share on social media.

However, it was also clear upon examination that technology, whilst having an important role to play, seems to be more appropriate when used for temporary exhibitions or public programs, rather than being a permanent fixture in a gallery setting. This was evident at the La Monnaie de Paris, who utilised their virtual reality experience for a school holiday program as it provided a versatile tour of parts of their building otherwise not accessible to the public. This approach keeps the technology up to date and relevant, in an ever-evolving environment.

Additionally, augmented reality experiences have become useful ways of telling stories in a museum context. La Monnaie de Paris has won awards for their innovative AR experience, and it has proven to be a useful way to explain the history of coins for those visitors not necessarily interested in numismatics. Equally, at the Royal Mint Experience, there was a good use of interactive videos and activity tables to explain ideas such as the history of coins as well as touching on some economic concepts.



Digital coin design desk display - La Monnaie de Paris

However, with all digital experiences, there is a large monetary and time commitment to ensuring that these technologies are both useful and relevant to the museum. Prototypes must be made, and the experience must be versatile enough so that it can be used in any space of the museum, or potentially even outside the museum as part of touring exhibitions or outreach programs in order for it to be successful.⁶

⁵ "Top 10 Museum Trends You Should Know."

⁶ Shortly after the Fellow returned from travelling, a worldwide pandemic was declared due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus, causing museums internationally to shut their doors to schools and members of the general public. The Fellow considered that in light of the pandemic, the role of digital experiences is more important than ever before in order to keep sharing content and to keep people engaged. For instance, La Monnaie de Paris runs 'virtual tours' whilst they are closed to the public. These experiences not only contribute to the ongoing survival of museums, but also to public morale in times of major change, economic uncertainty and public health crises.

Collaboration

Collaboration is significant for the innovation of both exhibitions and programs in creating visitor experiences. The Horniman Museum currently draws on institutions with established demographics in order to fill gaps in their own. For instance, 63% of their visitation in the 2018-19 financial year were family groups, so they often collaborate with partners such as universities and even radio stations who have an established audience, to ensure there is critical engagement with the collection.⁷

The museum's 'social role'

It is increasingly common for museums to have a more active social role in contemporary issues such as climate change and sustainability. Equally, visitors are using these spaces as an avenue to engage with these issues in a safe and secure environment. The Fellow observed that this was highlighted particularly at the Horniman Museum, who makes a concerted effort to address these issues in their temporary and permanent displays, including their aquarium and butterfly house.

Families and children were gently encouraged to consider issues of sustainability through seeing the habitat of certain species of sea life in the aquarium as well as the environmental implications of the fashion industry in a weaving workshop. This method could very well be applied to any museum, even within the context of a mint museum, where processes surrounding packaging and waste could be explored in a display or program.

All of these ideas were still linked to the Museum's core collections, whilst engaging with social commentary on very topical international concerns. Given the complexities faced in Australia over the summer of 2020 with the national bushfire crisis, this approach to a museum's social role in matters such as climate change is particularly pertinent in an Australian context.



'Cloutie tree' interactive display – Horniman Museum and Gardens

⁷ Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2018-2019 Annual Report, pg. 4, from Horniman Museum and Gardens website, <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/report-and-consolidated-financial-statements-for-the-year-ended-31-march-1.pdf>, accessed 29 March, 2020.

Accessibility

Accessibility was a key consideration in all the visitor experiences investigated by the Fellow. Some of the major learning's were:

Physical considerations

The Royal Mint has a three-year-old visitor experience attraction, and the construction of the visitor space took into consideration from its early inception the accessibility of the offerings. Hearing loops, straightforward and accessible thoroughfares and the height of displays were all considered and measured against recommended guidelines.

Equally, La Monnaie de Paris has a relatively new visitor space, and the Fellow was informed that the institution closely consulted with relevant stakeholders and governing bodies about access requirements. They took this into consideration when constructing their new exhibitions, visitor spaces and programs, with the inclusion of braille and touch labels in permanent displays.



'Wishing Well' at the Royal Mint Experience

Appealing to wider demographics

The Fellow observed that an important consideration when thinking about accessibility is ensuring that you have a clear definition of the museum's social role. This will certainly inform the museum's visitor experiences and make staff consider who they want to attract and why.

The Horniman Museum has a strong focus on broadening its social role and its interaction with all demographics within the London community, given that currently they have largely middle-class visitation. Their aim is that "by 2022/2023, 22% of general visits will be by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic visitors, 18% will be from less advantaged socio-economic groups and 6% will be from Disabled visitors".⁸

This demonstrates how, as a public institution, it is simply not acceptable to only appeal to your obvious or already established demographic, and that more emphasis and measures need to be put into place to achieve greater accessibility.



Family activity space – Horniman Museum and Gardens

Education – programs and lifelong learning

Curriculum links

Across the museums visited by the Fellow, there was a concerted effort to ensure that programs had suitable curriculum or school program links. There was also an evident focus on design, science and history within mint museums visited by the Fellow.

Materials ready for an Education program - La Monnaie de Paris

At the Royal Mint, they have begun including cross-curriculum links into their programs. For instance, one program run was about identifying 'fake' coins titled *The Fakes and Forgeries* workshop, which had links across history, science and design. This approach not only has proven educational benefits but contributed to ensuring that teachers had more reason to consider the destination for an informative visit. They always aim to create a challenging yet accessible program, with an activity and tour always included for schools.



Note: Whilst many of the museum experiences had educational programs that were 'curriculum linked', the Fellow observed that it was often the museums that were more interested in creating an educational 'experience' that had higher visitation figures. This observation is addressed in the recommendations.

Liaison with teaching staff

Liaison with key stakeholders such as teachers and support staff in the construction of educational programs has proven very successful for some of the institutions visited by the Fellow. After conducting research surveys, the Horniman Museum Education Team established that teachers want hands-on interactive experiences, rather than ones with workshop style activities or digital elements.

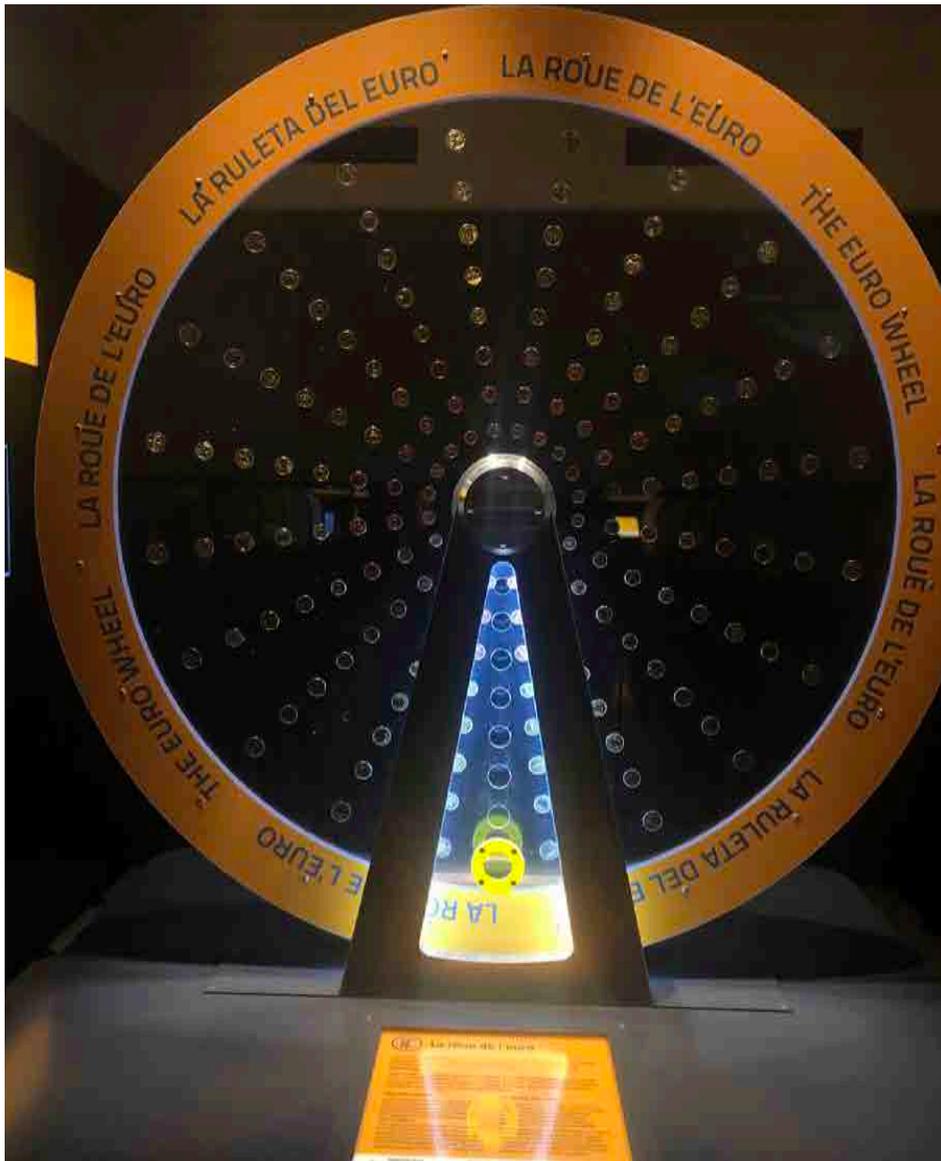
For this reason, they utilise a 'touch-collection' for their programs, with objects set aside specifically for school groups. This has proven to be very successful, despite it being a paid experience. Teachers are very attracted to the Horniman Museum as it has a child friendly collection, with a focus on natural history, world cultures and music, and this is really emphasised in their touch collection programs.

Tailor programs to your audience

It was a key learning of the Fellow that it is best to tailor your educational programs to different audiences, as opposed to a 'one size fits all' approach. The Museo Casa de la Moneda always include interactive components in their programs which are appropriately tailored to the age group. For instance, 'Gymkanas', a type of 'Scavenger Hunt', are used as a way for secondary students to engage with concepts such as history and economics in the gallery space, utilising the coin collection in the process. It was clear that all students were eagerly engaged in a way that wouldn't occur should they have been taken on a tour and completed an activity, as was done with the younger age groups.



Education Room - Museo Casa de la Moneda



Interactive display of coins - Cité de l'économie et de la monnaie

Relevance of content/collections

Keeping content socially relevant is one of the major challenges of any museum. Coin collecting, and numismatics is a particularly niche area, with an already established demographic or market that doesn't necessarily fall into the 'museum goer' or 'experience seeker' category.

However, the Fellow observed some methods being applied to keep content, such as coin and medallions, relevant in these museums including:

- » Focusing on stories in displays, rather than on specific collection items. The Royal Mint did this well through making the stories the foundation of the displays by interviewing employees in videos and audio experiences. They would then use objects as an accompaniment to these stories.
- » Updating galleries regularly to better reflect the use of money across different societies as seen in image 18.



Display on forms of spending - British Museum

- » Interactive ways of displaying coins or objects, such as what is done in image 17 at Cité de l'économie et de la monnaie (this Museum was recommended to the Fellow by the staff at La Monnaie de Paris).
- » Programs and exhibitions driven by explaining minting processes, and not just the history of the institution. This was done well at La Monnaie de Paris, where multiple digital activities were available to explain processes. These included video projected coin design tables, digital experiences to demonstrate the striking of coins and other elements of the manufacturing process in a modern way.
- » Incorporating modern platforms or concepts into the experience when trying to maintain/attract a young-adult demographic. Museo Casa de la Moneda have been able to leverage off a Netflix series, "La Casa de Papel", set within their building, which they refer to in their programs. This shows how leveraging off modern content or ideas can maintain relevance into the future. This could also include becoming involved in a YouTube series, podcasts, utilising live-streaming platforms as well as other contemporary forums for sharing information.
- » Creating networks for people who are interested in the subject matter, separate to appealing to the 'museum go-er' or 'experience seeker'. For instance, the BM currently runs a Money and Medals Project which engages with other museums with coin collections as well as numismatic communities.⁹ This way, museums are able to appeal to a wider variety of audiences, keeping their content relevant across different forums in or run by the institution.

These concepts could also easily be applied to other content-specific museums in order to keep their displays and programs innovative and appealing.

5. PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SECTORAL IMPACT

The Fellow found the George Alexander Fellowship experience profoundly empowering, giving them confidence and inspiration to pursue their career interests further in Australia. Building a new international network was one of the most beneficial outcomes for the Fellow. She has established a network of like-minded professionals to call on in the future both for work and career advice. The Fellow has already called on the institutions visited for further advice and information, making these connections instantly beneficial.

Additionally, the Fellow was exposed to working in cross-cultural institutions, and importantly, learnt to professionally navigate language barriers and cultural differences, which is a fundamental skill to acquire in an increasingly globalised world.

Professionally, the Fellow is looking forward to drawing on networks that have been established during the travel component of the Fellowship. Having these connections will be of great assistance in overcoming challenges and discussing innovation in approaches to the Fellow's work. The Fellow has also developed a far greater understanding of international trends in visitor experiences, something that could not have been acquired without the travel component of the Fellowship. The Fellow has also been exposed to best practice in approaches to exhibitions, programming, accessibility and education – all skills which can directly be applied to her current position and in other aspects of her career development.

As a result of the Fellowship, the Fellow looks forward to disseminating findings in an ongoing capacity in order to improve the innovative quality of visitor experiences and their accessibility. The Fellow was able to identify not only what can be improved, but what is being done well currently within the Australian

sector. The Fellow would also like to see the implementation of an international network incorporating many of the professionals met during her travels, in order to have a forum to discuss challenges, successes and ensure that international best practice is maintained into the future.



Hannah Webb and the Museum staff at La Monnaie de Paris

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Through the international travels and exposure to a variety of museums and visitor spaces, the Fellow was able to develop the following recommendations for the enhancement of visitor experiences and the longevity of the interest in numismatics in a museum context.

Note: these recommendations relate to governing bodies, government and non-government institutions, mint museums and museums and galleries in general.

1. International networks for content specific museums

The Fellowship really emphasised the importance of maintaining international networks in order to maintain a level of connectivity to those who are experiencing similar challenges and complexities. Due to the unique environment that mint museums or 'visitor experiences' are operating in, a major recommendation of the Fellow's research is to establish an international network for these professionals. This would be a network where museum professionals in the numismatic industry could come together to talk about challenges such as operating in a factory, the conservation of coins, how we can use our objects for educational programs, how we can better engage our visitors, and how we can collaborate – whether that be through online programs, travelling exhibitions with cross-cultural content or just discussing changing trends and updates in the industry.

2. Putting visitors at the heart of all decisions

The Fellow recommends that visitors should be the driving force behind any major decisions made by museums and galleries. Not only do a lot of museums hold their collections in trust for the people of their country, but without them, the objects within their collections could not be brought to life through critical engagement and stories. This approach has been encouraged by Museum Consultants Sabine Doolin and Sally Manuireva, who run international workshops called *Tear up the audience rulebook*, emphasising the need to put the audiences at the centre of any cultural organisation.¹⁰

This was a major take away from the Royal Mint Experience, who put significant emphasis on the importance of gathering stories and engaging with visitors if they have or had, a connection to their story or history. They would go as far as to put out pamphlets asking for these stories and asking their front of house staff to notify the museum team if a visiting member of the public had a story to share so that a conversation could be arranged.

Understanding the visitor can often take sophisticated market research that will also include museum staff, for example curators and content producers, engaging in conversations and discussions with relevant people. Any experience – public programs, exhibitions, education programs, digital capabilities, accessibility considerations – should all focus on the experience of the visitor and their expectations, which will in turn, fulfil the purpose of the institution to share the collection and their stories in a meaningful way.

10 "Tear up the audience rulebook," Insight Unlocked, accessed 27 April 2020, <https://insightunlocked.net/services-2/tear-up-the-audience-rulebook/>



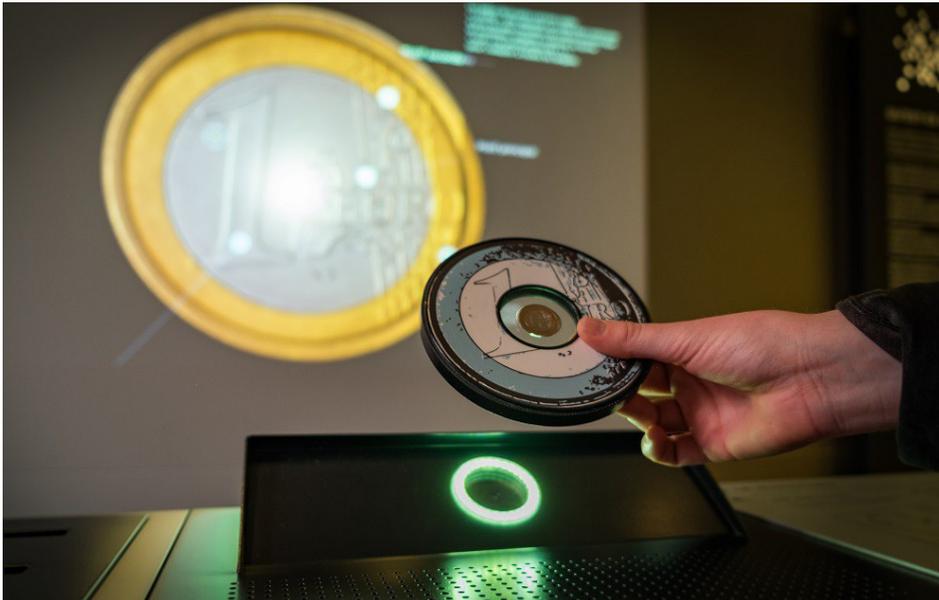
3. The role of technology

Technology is an inextricable part of contemporary life, and this is no different when it comes to museum experiences. Visitors have come to expect that there will be some element of digital interaction in museum spaces. However, this doesn't mean that they shouldn't be well considered, as some experiences do not need technology. For instance, education programs appear to be extremely effective through simply having hands-on interaction with collections – something that the Fellow observed at the Royal Mint, Horniman Museum and the Museo Casa de la Moneda.

However, digital technologies can very much enhance an experience when used effectively, so long as it doesn't replace the core function of an institution. For instance, museums cannot replace face to face tours with virtual reality experiences, but they can incorporate it into the experience. These technologies must be trialled and tested and must be able to evolve. The technology must also be versatile so that it can be utilised for a variety of experiences and reach multiple demographics. For instance, an augmented reality experience may appeal to families who can interact with it, but should it be incorporated into every tour? Will it have the same messaging for other age groups? Can it be taken on an outreach program, making the return on investment viable?

Technology is moving so quickly, that any investment must have the capability to change and adapt. This is an important consideration to museums, particularly in the procurement process. It's important that technology does not replace the collection as the foundation of the visitor experience, but is there to enhance it, encouraging visitors to engage with content in an exciting way and bringing the museum into the modern era.

Make your own medal activity - La Monnaie de Paris



Numiscope AR at La Monnaie de Paris (Numiscope : © Monnaie de Paris | Hermann Vaalogé)

4. Interactivity for Education

Due to their findings, the Fellow recommends that hands-on interactivity is incorporated into all education programs. The Fellow noted that schools who participate in interactive activities that encourage students to engage with content and concepts, seem to have very positive experiences, particularly at the Royal Mint, the Horniman Museum and the Museo Casa de la Moneda.

Each of these institutions created experiences that did not rely on worksheets or digital experiences, but rather encouraged children to explore the collections in group settings. After observing several education programs across these institutions that included varying ages, socio-economic backgrounds and languages, the Fellow did not see any students lose interest in the activities, which indicated that this approach can be universally successful.

Additionally, the Fellow recommends that museums endeavour to strike a balance between a curriculum linked program and an 'educational experience'. Whilst a lot of teachers and schools are looking for these curriculum links to justify the excursion, it is important that the program allows students to feel that they have 'experienced' something – this could be through interactivity, more independent programs such as "Scavenger Hunts" or self-directed programs.

5. Consultation is key

It is important when constructing visitor experiences in a museum to look to those who can advise on the requirements or expectations of the group that is being targeted. Then, not only will museums receive practical advice, they will also be equipped to think beyond the average model or experience, and to consider how experiences can be reviewed and revived, whilst still maintaining their core value and purpose.

The Fellow found that consultation was particularly important when ensuring experiences are accessible, something that the Royal Mint and La Monnaie de Paris both considered when revitalising their visitor experience spaces. Consultation was also extremely important when creating education programs by discovering what teachers and students would like to see and gain from their visits, particularly when they have to justify expenditure. Museum staff may be experts in their chosen field, but consulting in areas that are not within their sphere of expertise, as mentioned above, will lead to increasingly diverse and effective visitor experiences.

6. Contemporary exhibitions in mint museums (or museums with a predominately historical collections)

Where subject matter (or core business) is increasingly becoming less common in society – such as coins – institutions must seek new ways to link collections with modern concepts. This was done extremely well in institutions the Fellow visited. Teams sought out contemporary artists whose work could be linked to their core subject matter. Both La Monnaie de Paris and Museo Casa de la Moneda saw a renewed interest in their institutions during these exhibitions, highlighting the importance of having displays with a contemporary focus, rather than just reflecting on the past in a traditional way. For this reason, the Fellow recommends more exhibitions with contemporary approaches to conveying stories or concepts, rather than ones purely grounded in historical information. This will ensure historical content is relevant, appealing and accessible.

Note: This statement is not to detract from the merit of more traditional history-based exhibitions and displays, which still have wide-spread appeal and seek to educate visitors on historical content.

7. Define your social role

In a world where museums are increasingly being viewed as both safe and critical spaces for the exploration of ideas and discussions, museums must define their 'social role' and how they will implement this. It was clear at the Horniman Museum in London that they had a clearly defined 'social role', which was to be a safe and accessible space for all visitors. They also used their collections, which have a focus on natural history, to open a space to safely discuss important contemporary issues such as climate change, and the implications this has on the world in both a localised and global context. Having a clearly defined 'social role' is going to be a significant part of the longevity of modern museums, and the way in which it is projected to intended audiences or visitors will also be critical.

8. Consider measures of defining success

Visitation numbers are often used to quantify a museum's merit or success. However, the Fellow did discover that many museums did not have relatively high visitation, despite utilising ground-breaking methods in digital experiences, education programs and exhibitions (see Appendix 1).

This has encouraged the Fellow to think differently about how success is quantified in museums, and whether it should be focused on innovation, rather than the number of annual visitors or the revenue stream they bring into the institution. Additionally, the data represented in visitor numbers cannot take into consideration external factors including economic circumstances and restrictions of location. Therefore, when looking at visitor numbers comparatively, it would be dismissive to consider these figures in isolation from these external and often uncontrollable influences.

Whilst these figures are certainly important when assessing the viability and successes of the institution, it doesn't necessarily reflect the innovation of the 'museum'. New ways of communicating this success to stakeholders should be considered in order to inspire innovation in the industry. This will encourage museums to continue being hubs of cultural heritage through exciting portrayals of knowledge and culture, whilst still moving forward and contributing to the economy by being central tourist destinations for generations to come.

9. Commercialisation

Increasingly museums have to look to other revenue streams in order to maintain the viability of their institution. Creative ways of bringing this revenue in including VIP experiences, memberships, partnerships and commercial events can, and are, contributing to the viability of these institutions, whilst still maintaining the core value of the museums and their missions. Each museum must consider having a team which is solely dedicated to their 'commercial' business, rather than completely 'commercialising' the museum. It is important that they are treated separately. It appears that increasingly, one can no longer exist without the other.

Summary of recommendations:





Minting coins the old fashion way - Museo Casa de la Moneda

Further considerations:

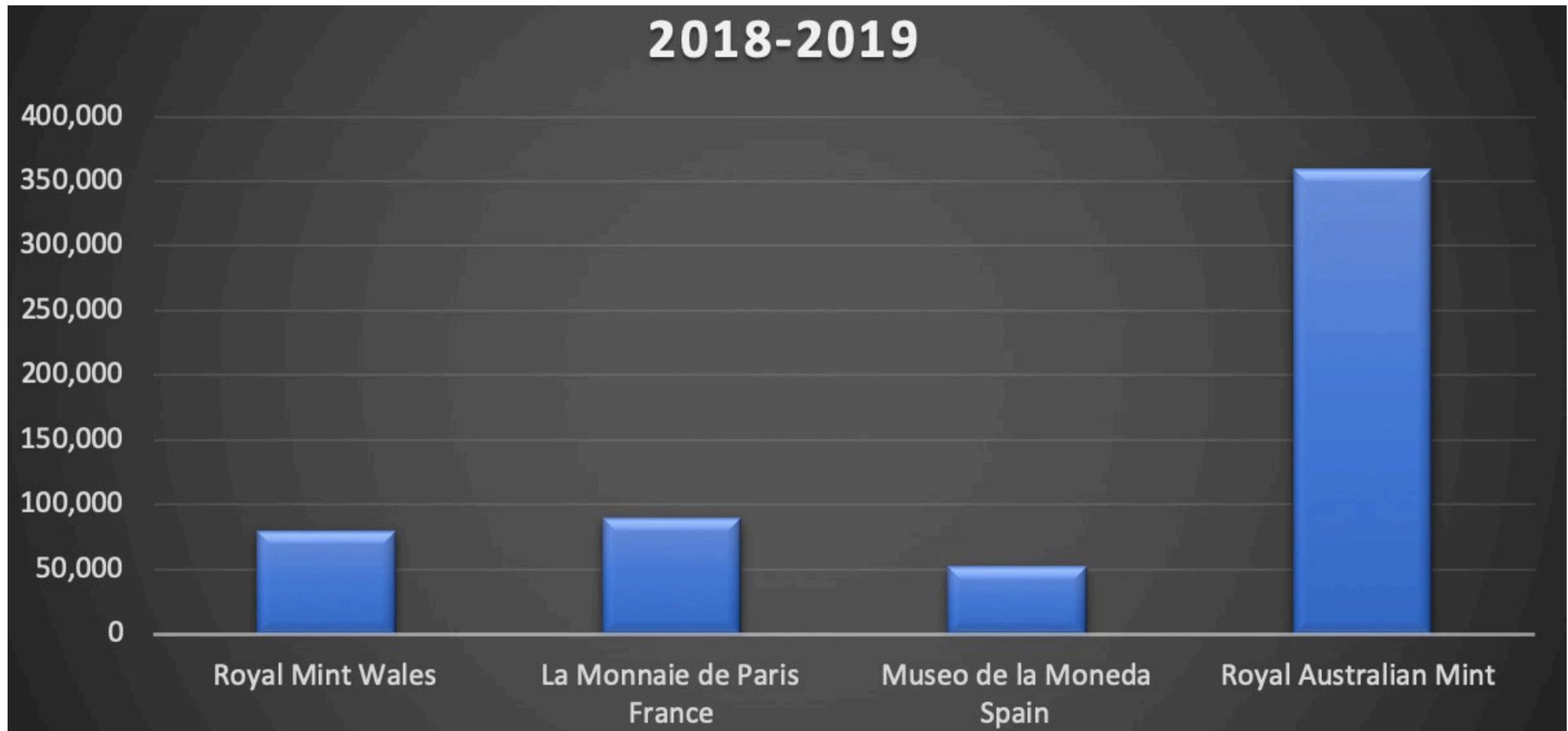
The Fellow found that overall there is still a clear interest in all the institutions that were visited, despite there being an international societal shift toward intangible forms of money. Through interactive programming, digital technologies and contemporary exhibitions, these institutions are finding new ways to share their collections and stories to keep them relevant for generations to come. Each museum is focusing on their role as not just factories, but also cultural institutions, and in doing so, is laying the foundations for ongoing viability when tangible money becomes less common. The way that coins convey social messaging, significant stories and the cultural heritage of a society gives way for museum professionals to think critically about how this can be translated into a modern museum context, keeping them both relevant and engaging.

The Fellow's main goals were to investigate across the visitor experiences, accessibility, education and how institutions keep their content relevant. The Fellow feels that all of these areas were addressed, giving her ample knowledge and motivation to leverage of this experience and apply what was learnt in her own workplace, industry and professional life.

The findings all indicate that there is a rich future ahead for mint museums and museums in general, so long as they continue along innovative and inclusive pathways, with the visitor at the heart of all decisions.

7. APPENDIX

Appendix 1: These figures reflect the most recent visitor numbers for the Royal Mint, La Monnaie de Paris, Museo de la Moneda and the Royal Australian Mint (these figures include students and are approximations).



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