Touching History

An evaluation of Hands On desks at The British Museum

July 2008

This is an online version of a report prepared by MHM for the British Museum. Commercially sensitive information has been removed

MORRIS HARGREAVES McINTYRE
Touching History: An evaluation of Hands On desks at The British Museum

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50 Copperas Street, Manchester, UK M4 1HS
Telephone 0161 839 3311
Fax 0161 8393377
Email intray@lateralthinkers.com
www.lateralthinkers.com
Hands On desks attract more families than the British Museum does overall, and a higher proportion of visitors are from the UK.

Nearly all visitors decided to stop at the desks incidentally.

Almost all visitors to Hands On desks said that the experience increased the quality of their visit and brought it to life.
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Introduction

1.1 The Hands On programme

The Hands On programme at the British Museum (previously called Please Touch) has been running since January 2000. Initially, the programme ran for three days a week in the HSBC Money Gallery. Now, Hands On desks are staffed from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. daily in the:

- Enlightenment Gallery, Room 1
- Temporary exhibitions, Room 2
- Living & Dying, The Wellcome Trust Gallery, Room 24
- Roman Britain, Room 49
- Money, The HSBC Gallery, Room 68

Also, from Tuesday to Thursday, there is a desk in the:

- China, The Joseph E Hotung Gallery, Room 33

The desks are staffed by around 90 volunteers.

1.2 Engaging Visitors

The rationale behind the Hands On desks in based on the ‘Attract, Engage, Outcome’ model.

![Diagram: ATTRACT (visitors) • ENGAGE (with collections) • OUTCOMES (for visitors)]

In order to enhance the visitor experience at the British Museum, the ‘Attract, Engage, Outcomes’ model can be applied to the evaluation of the Hands On programme in order to assess:

- Attraction to the desks, objects and galleries
- Engagement with objects ‘on offer’ at the desks and whether this method of interpretation leads to visitors moving up the browser/follower/searcher/researcher hierarchy
Hands On desks Evaluation

- Outcomes in terms of whether visitors move up the motivational hierarchy (social/intellectual/emotional/spiritual) and experience other personal benefits from their engagement with the desks.

1.3 Previous Research

Francesca Monti of the Institute of Archaeology undertook an evaluation of the Hands On programme in March 2004. This report found that:

• 72% of interviewees tended to touch or look in detail at least 5 objects during their sessions
• 92% of visitors came across the desks by chance whilst visiting the galleries
• 37% of users were not clear on what the function of the desk was when they first approached it
• 56% of respondents did not notice the signboard for the programme next to each desk

The 2004 Evaluation had 5 key recommendations:

• To provide a leaflet (including a map showing gallery locations of the desk) available at the main Information Desk and at each of the object handling desks
• To provide each desk with a clearly visible sign
• To address the lack of signage in the Enlightenment Gallery
• To aim to have at least one visitor per desk at all times to address the ‘empty desk syndrome’, making it easier for visitors to approach a busy desk
• To increase usage among non-English speakers through using non-verbal, visual methods of communication

This evaluation will attempt to ascertain whether there has been any significant improvement since the first evaluation was undertaken. However, different methods were used in each evaluation programme. Where possible, comparisons will be made.
Key Findings

Detailed findings are presented in each chapter. Summary findings are:

Visitor Profile

41% of visitors to Hands On desks are first time visitors to the British Museum.

59% of visitors to Hands On desks are repeat visitors to the British Museum.

79% of visitors to Hands On desks are generalists.

61% of visitors to Hands On desks are from the UK.

38% of visitors to Hands On desks are from overseas.

Visitor Behaviour

80% of visitors to Hands On desks spend less than 5 minutes there.

55% of visitors to Hands On desks handle 1 or 2 objects.

58% of visitors went to one Hands On desk.

42% of visitors went to more than one Hands On desk.

On average, visitors went to 2 Hands On desks.

The desks in Room 1 (Enlightenment Gallery) and Room 49 (Roman Britain) are the most popular, each attracting 41% of total Hands On visitors.

Motivations & Expectations

The motivation of Hands On desk users is similar to that of British Museum visitors as a whole, with 29% socially motivated, 49% intellectually motivated, 18% emotionally motivated and 5% spiritually motivated.

94% of visitors decided to stop at Hands On desks incidentally.

49% of visitors to Hands On desks expected to handle an object.

Desk Signage & Appearance

90% of visitors to Hands On desks found out about them on the day of their visit.
54% of visitors had not seen any signs for the Hands On desks.

81% of visitors said that the signs had assisted them in finding the Hands On desks.

**Desk Volunteers**

67% of visitors are not aware that Hands On desks are staffed by volunteers.

98% of visitors are satisfied with the service given by desk staff.

**Engagement**

61% of visitors to Hands On desks remain in the gallery having used the desk.

**Outcomes**

48% of visitors to Hands On desks gained new knowledge.

22% of visitors to Hands On desks gained insight.

19% of visitors to Hands On desks had an interesting personal encounter.

96% of visitors to Hands On desks said the desks increased the quality of their visit.

**A typical Hands On desk visitor**

In order to gain a better understanding of how the Hands On desks work, it is useful to develop an understanding of a typical Hands On visitor. This can be described as:

**PROFILE**

- Is female (54%)
- Is White British (57%)
- Has general knowledge (79%)
- Is from the UK (63%)

**BEHAVIOUR**

- Spends 1-5 minutes at the Hands On desks (80%)
- Handles objects (71%)
- Decided to visit a desk whilst they were there (94%)
MOTIVATIONS/EXPECTATIONS

• Their main reason for visiting is a general one, to see the collections (43%)
• Is intellectually motivated (49%)
• More specifically, wants to improve their knowledge & understanding (62%)
• Expects to handle an object (49%)

SIGNAGE

• Did not see any signs for the Hands On desks (54%)
• If they did see the signs, was attracted to the desks by them (93%)

VOLUNTEERS

• Is not aware that the desks are staffed by volunteers (67%)
• Is very satisfied with the performance of volunteers (88%)

OUTCOMES

• Gains new knowledge (83%)
• Stays in the gallery having looked at the desks (61%)
• Said that the Hands On desk increased the quality of their visit (96%)
What we did

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre was commissioned to carry out an evaluation of the Hands On desks at the British Museum.

The research was split across:

- Enlightenment Gallery, Room 1
- Temporary exhibitions, Room 2
- Living and Dying, The Wellcome Trust Gallery, Room 24
- Roman Britain, Room 49
- Money, The HSBC Gallery, Room 68

3.1 Research objectives

Key questions for consideration in this research are:

- What types of visitors use the desks
- Do people find them incidentally or come specifically for them
- How do they find out about them
- How long do people spend at the desks
- How do people behave at the desks - Do people handle the objects, ask questions or just look
- Are visitors satisfied with the response of volunteers
- Do visitors visit more than one desk
- What else do Hands On visitors do whilst they are in the Museum
- Do all desks perform in a similar way or do visitors respond to each in a different way
- What attracts people to the desks
- Do the desks increase visitor enjoyment
- What outcomes do visitors get from using the desks
- Are the desks increasing visitor engagement and encouraging them to look at more objects
• Do visitors feel a difference when handling replica as opposed to real objects
• Can we identify the type of objects with which visitors engage most strongly
• What do visitors expect from the desk
• Why do some not engage
• How do people respond to the signage and the name
• Are visitors aware that it is volunteers who staff the desk
• Is the design of the desk attractive

3.2 Methods

The following research techniques were employed.

Observation & intervention

Our researchers were positioned in the vicinity of the Hands On desks and observed visitor behaviour in order to assess:
• How long each visitor/party spent at the desk
• Whether they were in a family group or not
• How many people were at the desk
• Whether they looked at the sign and then approached the desk
• How they approached the desk (directly/imitating another visitor/tentative)
• Whether they talked to the volunteer to just watched
• How many objects they handled
• Whether their engagement was brief, intermediate or deep
• After leaving the desk, did they stay in the gallery

Having observed visitors to the Hands On desks, our researchers then conducted a vox pop in order to probe a bit deeper to find out:
• What attracted them to the desk
• Whether they had visited more than one desk on that day
• Whether the experience at different desks, varied
• What their expectations were of the desk(s)
• Whether their expectations were met
• Whether using the desk(s) encouraged them to look at more objects
• Whether they were aware if the objects were real or replica
• Whether they felt different handling real or replica objects
• What types of objects interested them most and why
• How they could get more out of the desks
• What they thought about the name ‘Hands On’
• What they thought about the design of the desk(s)
• Whether the desk affected their experience of the museum or their feelings about the object

**Self-completion profiling questionnaires**

In order to supplement the qualitative research, we asked visitors to the Hands On desks to fill in a short self-completion questionnaire. A total of 734 questionnaires were completed. These questionnaires provided us with demographic data in addition to motives for visiting the desks and satisfaction levels. British Museum staff also handed questionnaires out in order for us to achieve the following samples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gallery</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enlightenment Gallery (Room 1)</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Exhibitions (Room 2)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wellcome Trust Gallery, Living &amp; Dying (Room 24)</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Britain (Room 49)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money, The HSBC Gallery, (Room 68)</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comparison with other data**

In order to provide a context for this research we have made a comparison with Year 2 (April ’06 to March ’07) visitor data for the British Museum as a whole.

In our March 2008 rolling research we also added an extra question to ask about visitors’ awareness of the Hands On desks. The results of this research can be found in Chapter 6.
Hands On desks Evaluation

**4**

Visitor Profile


**Visitor profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hands On desks</th>
<th>Room 1</th>
<th>Room 2</th>
<th>Room 24</th>
<th>Room 49</th>
<th>Room 68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Repeat visiting**

The profile of users of Hands On desks is predominantly repeat visitors, whereas most visitors to the Museum are first-time visitors.

**Knowledge of subject area**

Hands On desks do not seem to have a specific appeal on the basis of specialist knowledge, attracting a similar profile to that of Museum visitors has a whole.

**Origin**

The Hands On desks have a greater appeal for UK visitors than for overseas visitors. 19% of users of Hands On desks come from London, 42% of users of Hands On desks come from elsewhere in the UK and 38% of users of Hands On desks are from overseas.
Gender

46% of visitors to Hands On desks were male, 54% were female. This is similar to the gender profile for the Museum overall.

Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Hands On desks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or under</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 – 19</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 24</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 34</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 44</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 – 54</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 – 59</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 64</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly a fifth of visitors to Hands On desks were aged 16 or under, a slightly higher proportion than for the Museum as a whole. Not surprisingly, this form of interactivity (like others) appeals to children and young people.

There were fewer visitors to Hands On desks aged between 25 and 44, compared to the Museum overall.

There were also fewer visitors to Hands On desks aged between 45 and 59 years old, compared to the Museum overall.

However, a higher proportion of visitors aged over 60 visited the Hands On desks, compared with the Museum as a whole.

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of visitors to Hands On desks is different to that of the overall profile of the Museum.
Segmentation

The table below describes the segments that users of Hands On desks have been divided into:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Broad needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sightseers</td>
<td>First time visitors making a general visit. Mainly tourists who want to ‘do’ the museum</td>
<td>Ease of access, comfort, orientation, good facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self developers</td>
<td>Non-specialists wanting to informally improve their general knowledge about subjects covered in the museum.</td>
<td>Journey of discovery, layered information, finding out new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>Mixed age groups, wanting fun and educational trip for children</td>
<td>Ease of access and movement, child friendly facilities and activities, different levels of service to meet diverse age needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Social Visitors</td>
<td>Repeat visitors, meeting up with others at the museum. Use the museum as a sociable space and want to feel a sense of ownership in their surroundings.</td>
<td>Ease of access, comfort, orientation, good facilities, warm welcome, accessible exhibitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Specialists wanting to deepen their knowledge further by engaging deeply with the collection</td>
<td>High quality access to collections, critical engagement, access to expert staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Lovers</td>
<td>Spiritually and emotionally motivated visitors who want to commune with objects in the collection, and use their existing knowledge as a base to go deeper</td>
<td>Ambience, deep sensory engagement, space for contemplation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The diagram below compares the proportion of visitors that fall into each segment at the Hands On desks with those for the whole Museum.

**Visitor Segments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitor Segment</th>
<th>Hands On desk visitors</th>
<th>British Museum visitors (Yr 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Lovers</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Experts 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Social Visitors</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Repeat Social Visitors 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Families 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-developers</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Self-developers 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sightseers</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Sightseers 30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This model shows that the segmented audience for the Hands On desks is slightly different to the whole Museum. More than a third of users (34%) of Hands On desks were Families. This is significantly more than for the Museum as a whole (12%). These figures should be considered carefully as they highlight families’ attraction to interactive activities.

There were slightly more Art Lovers who used Hands On desks (18% compared to 13%).

Virtually the same percentage of Self-developers used Hands On desks as for the whole Museum (23% and 24%).

The percentage of Repeat Social Visitors who used Hands On desks was almost identical to the percentage for the whole Museum (11% compared to 12%).

Fewer Experts used the Hands On desks (4% compared to 9%).

Significantly fewer Sightseers used the Hands On desks (9% compared to 30%). This reflects the lower incidence of overseas tourists using the desks, as they dominate this segment.
5

Visitor Behaviour

5.1 How long do visitors spend at the desks?

Most visitors to Hands On desks spent less than 5 minutes there (80%).

Our researchers only observed a very small number of visitors in The Enlightenment Gallery (Room 1). This revealed that visitors were prepared to spend more than 31 minutes at this Hands On desk. We have removed Room 1 from the diagram above, as we believe that the dwell time of the visitors observed was untypical.

Visitors spend the shortest time in Roman Britain (Room 49). 94% of people spent 5 minutes or less.

Twice the amount of visitors (20%) spent 6-10 minutes in Room 1, compared to Rooms 2 and 24. Only 6% of visitors spent 6-10 minutes in Room 49.

The desk in Room 2 does not retain users for longer than 20 minutes.

The desk in Room 49 does not retain users for longer than 10 minutes.
Research amongst families and non-families showed that slightly more non-families spend 1-5 minutes and 11-20 minutes at the desks. In the 6-10 minute category, families spent slightly longer.

5.2 What do people do at the desks?

We observed visitors who were engaged with Hands On desks. 71% of visitors who stopped at Hands On desks handled an object.

Handling objects

More objects are handled in Room 1 than in any other of the rooms observed.

Interestingly, all the visitors observed at the desk in Room 1 did handle objects. This contrasts sharply with rooms 2, 24 and 49 where 19%, 37% and 44%, respectively, did not to handle any objects. There could be any number of reasons for this. The approach and attitude of the volunteer, the intrinsic appeal or nature of the objects, too many other visitors or levels of confidence of the Hands On desk user could be factors.

‘We used one in the Living and Dying section, that was really good as well. For us it makes it more for children. Otherwise you’re just looking in the glass cabinets, and for them, they like things they can touch.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 1
‘Those guides are seriously knowledgeable, and it’s brilliant how they address the children first... They are really, really good at that. And again, last time we were here, everyone that spoke to Zoe were asking questions, what do you think of this?’ Visitor vox pop, Room 1

Only a small percentage of visitors to Hands On desks use the experience as purely an opportunity to ask questions (7%). The vast majority of visitors (93%) expect and get some form of interaction. It does not appear to be the case that visitors use Hands On desks as Information Points.

For some visitors, the opportunity of touching objects is very exciting.

‘I actually like picking things up.’ Visitor vox pop

‘It was just lovely to know that you could pick something up that was authentic. It was just lovely to put your hands on something.’ Visitor vox pop

‘It’s a nice idea, as soon as I saw that I thought, oh that’s really clever. I’ve not seen that before in a museum.’ Visitor vox pop

‘You do think sometimes when you’re looking in the cases, sometimes I’d like to pick that up and really look closely.’ Visitor vox pop

‘You can’t replace that. You can’t replace the touching. In teaching you use all the senses don’t you? As a teacher we try and make every experience, an experience for all the senses, so it’s realistic, and that really helps.’ Visitor vox pop

For families, the chance to hold and examine items closely is particularly appealing.

‘Our daughter... she was very taken with the fact that she could touch the object.’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think particularly for the children, because otherwise you’re just looking at things.’ Visitor vox pop

‘When we came to see the Mummies, I looked it up on the website and I found out what else there was to do for families, so I went straight to the part where you can get the activities. From that I found the Hands On experiences and thought ‘we’ll go to that as well’.’ Visitor vox pop

Talking to the volunteer

Inevitably, some visitors like to engage with the volunteer at the desk.

‘...you can read as much as you like, it’s always nice to have a personal one-to-one conversation and you can actually ask your own questions. It’s
been very well laid out, the descriptions are beautiful but it's nice to talk.'
Visitor vox pop

‘...it’s interactive isn't it. It's not in a cabinet, there's somebody to talk to.'
Visitor vox pop

‘It's good to hold something, and find out about it, and ask any questions that you did have. You get a good knowledge of it.' Visitor vox pop

Listening

Some visitors are happy just to listen.

‘Usually you have to read tiny bits of information from those bits of paper, that are next to the objects. When someone’s speaking to you they can tell you quite a lot sometimes.' Visitor vox pop

‘It's more of a personalised experience really.' Visitor vox pop

5.3 Do visitors go to more than one desk?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of desks visited?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

58% of people went to one Hands On desk.

42% of people went to more than one Hands On desk.

‘If I see another hands on I’ll just go up.' Visitor vox pop

‘Definitely. Most 100% yes!' Visitor vox pop

‘Yes we’ll be off like a shot. Elbowing old people and children out the way!' Visitor vox pop

On average, visitors went to 2 desks.
5.4 Which desks are most popular?

The most visited desks are in the Enlightenment Gallery (Room 1) and Roman Britain (Room 49). Both attracted 41% of Hands on Visitors. The second most visited desk is in Money, the HSBC Gallery (Room 68) attracting 39% of Hands On visitors. The third most visited desk is in Living and Dying, The Wellcome Trust Gallery (Room 24) attracting 34% of Hands On visitors. The least visited desk is in Temporary Exhibitions (Room 2).

5.5 Do all the desks perform in a similar way and do visitors respond to each in a different way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Room 1</th>
<th>Room 2</th>
<th>Room 24</th>
<th>Room 49</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table above show levels of engagement taken from the observation of visitors at Hands on desks. The degree of engagement is split equally between brief, intermediate and deep (33%, 34%, 33%). However, each desk varies considerably in the pattern of engagement levels.

The desk in the Enlightenment Gallery (Room 1) is recorded as having 64% of visitors engaging deeply. This concurs with the data that shows that all the visitors observed at the desk in Room 1 handled objects.

The desk in Temporary Exhibitions (Room 2) is recorded as having 61% of visitors engaging at an intermediate level.

The desk in Living and Dying, The Wellcome Trust Gallery, shows a fairly equal balance of 38% of visitors engaging briefly, 28% with intermediate levels of engagement and 34% deeply engaged.

The desk in Roman Britain (Room 49) shows a large majority at a brief or intermediate level (44% and 39%) and a minority (17%) who were engaged deeply.

5.6 What else did visitors to Hands On desks do whilst they were in the Museum?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of these have you done during your visit today?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>From which Hands On desk did you get this questionnaire?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>734</td>
<td>Room 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td></td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see a specific paid for exhibition</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see a specific free exhibition</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see a specific collection or items from a collection</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just a general visit to see the collections</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a talk, tour or special event</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet friends</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the shop</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the cafe/restaurant</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look at the building</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attend a business meeting</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table above shows that most visitors to Hands On desks were on a general visit to the Museum (60%). Nearly a third of visitors (29%) described themselves as there to see a specific paid for exhibition. Nearly a quarter (24%) said they were there to see a specific free exhibition. However, nearly a quarter also said they were there to see a specific collection or items from a collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>And which, of all of those was your MAIN reason for visiting today?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Room 1</th>
<th>Room 2</th>
<th>Room 24</th>
<th>Room 49</th>
<th>Room 68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see a specific paid for exhibition</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see a specific free exhibition</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see a specific collection or items from a collection</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just a general visit to see the collections</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a talk, tour or special event</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet friends</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the shop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the cafe/restaurant</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look at the building</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attend a business meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above show the main reasons people visited the museum. Nearly half of visitors to Hands On desks were at the Museum on a general visit to see the collections. More than a quarter of visitors (27%) were there to see a specific paid for exhibition.
Motivations & Expectations

Hierarchy of motivation

We have identified four key drivers for visiting museums:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See museum as a...</th>
<th>Have this...</th>
<th>And they seek this from a visit...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHURCH</td>
<td>SPIRITUAL</td>
<td>Creative stimulation and quiet contemplation, they see museums as an opportunity to escape and recharge their batteries, food for the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>EMOTIONAL</td>
<td>May have a personal connection to the subject matter, want to see fascinating objects in an inspiring setting, seek ambience, deep sensory and intellectual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCHIVE</td>
<td>INTELLECTUAL</td>
<td>Keen to encourage their children’s or their own interest and knowledge, may have professional interest in the subject, seek a journey of discovery, to find out new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>SOCIAL</td>
<td>See museums as an enjoyable place to spend time with friends and family, seek ease of access and orientation, good facilities and services, welcoming staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These motives form a hierarchy: as visitors move up from Social through to Spiritual motivations they become more increasingly engaged with the museum and its collections. The further up the hierarchy they reach, the more fulfilling and rewarding visitors report their visit to be. That doesn’t mean that Social visits should be any less valued, it simply means that they result in lower levels of engagement with the content of the Museum.

At each level of the hierarchy visitors have different needs. The suggestion is not that visitors are forced or even led up this hierarchy, but that they get the opportunity to engage at the deepest level they wish to.

Main motivation

Using a series of statements on the exit survey, we asked visitors to Hands On desks to identify their main motivation for visiting the British Museum. The chart below shows the main motivation of Hands On desk visitors compared to all British Museum visitors.
The chart above illustrates that the motivation of Hands On desk users is similar to that of British Museum visitors as a whole. The main difference is that 49% of visitors to Hands On desks are intellectually motivated compared to 37% of Museum visitors and 29% of Hands On visitors are socially motivated compared to 43% of Museum visitors.
6.1 Did visitors use the desks incidentally or come specifically for them?

The graph above shows that a very high percentage of visitors decided to stop at Hands On desks incidentally (94%). Only 6% of visitors intended to visit the Hands On desks.

Amongst the individual desks, the one in Living and Dying The Wellcome Trust Gallery (Room 24) is the desk with the highest proportion of people who intended to visit (10%).

6.2 What attracts visitors to Hands On desks?

‘If I come across them I go and look at them, because they’re interesting.’

*Visitor vox pop*

‘We just saw the things on the desk first, and then saw that we could come over and have Hands On.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘You get an idea of the weight of course, which of course you don’t get just looking in a cabinet do you?’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘It’s wonderful. I get the sense and the feel. Your fingers are on something that people have made.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘We were passing the table, and looked at something that looks traditional, and as you come up you think it is, and then it’s not.’ *Visitor vox pop*
‘I like the fact that we can touch some of the things. Very nice to be able to ask questions. It’s really useful. Wish there was more.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘We noticed it didn’t we? When I looked I saw people standing there, and I heard the man talking and I could see a pile of objects or something, and I thought ‘oh that would be interesting’.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘We’d been commenting on all the things behind the glass. There were things we’d liked to have taken out and actually opened. Some of the glass artefacts we’d like to actually handle. We saw there was an opportunity here.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘What attracted me was that little man, and then I sort of looked at the place. All the carvings on that. Unbelievable really.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘The objects, and the fact there was no-one at the desk.’ *Visitor vox pop*

### 6.3 Does the fact that other people may be at the desk make any difference?

The research into the Hands On Programme in 2004 found that it is easier for a visitor to approach a desk that is bustling with activities. One of the recommendations from this research was to aim to have at least one visitor at every desk at all times to avoid ‘empty desk syndrome’.

Our research showed, not surprisingly, that when more people are at a desk, they are likely to handle fewer items. However, more people at a desk did not mean that fewer items are looked at.

‘There was already somebody there, holding things, and it caught my eye.’

*Visitor vox pop*

Interestingly, however, a desk with several people around it is not appealing to everyone.

‘In the Enlightenment Gallery but twice I walked past it and both times there were people using it, otherwise I would have done.’ *Visitor vox pop*

‘The more there are, the more chance you’ve got to go on one. I wouldn’t queue up for one.’ *Visitor vox pop*
6.4 What do visitors expect from the desk and how does this compare to what they actually do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you expect to get from visiting the desk?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>From which Hands On desk did you get this questionnaire?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Room 1</td>
<td>Room 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To ask a question</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To handle object</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hear more about the collection</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hear more about certain objects</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you actually get from visiting the desk?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>From which Hands On desk did you get this questionnaire?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Room 1</td>
<td>Room 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question answered</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New knowledge</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting encounter with interesting person</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables above compare peoples’ expectations with peoples’ experience of visiting Hands On desks. The data shows that only 7% of people expected to ask a question whereas 59% of people actually got a question answered.

Although some visitors had clearly not seen the signs and were curious as to what was going on at the desks, handling objects came out as a popular expectation and outcome.
Outcome shift

One third of socially motivated visitors had a social outcome, but 41% actually achieved an intellectual outcome, whilst another 25% had an emotional or spiritual outcome.

Visitors to Hands On desks who were intellectually motivated largely fulfilled their motivations (74%). However nearly a fifth had an emotional outcome.
Desk Signage & Appearance

7.1 How did visitors find out about the desks?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When did you find out about 'Hands On' desk?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>From which Hands On desk did you get this questionnaire?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Room 1  Room 2  Room 24  Room 49  Room 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before my visit today</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During my visit today</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I came across it when entering the gallery</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of visitors, 65% only find out about the Hands On desks once they are in the gallery. A further 25% find out about the desks during their visit.

This equates to nearly the same figure as 2004 (92%) who said they came across the desks by chance when they were visiting the galleries. Only 9% of visitors said that they found out about the desk prior to their visit. 1% of visits answered 'Other’ to this question, with the following responses:

- A previous visit (x 22)
- British Museum website (x 14)
- Saw it when walking around (x 6)
- We’ve been to the desks before in other galleries (x 2)

The continuing lack of awareness of the Hands On programme is a cause for concern.
7.2 How do visitors respond to the signage and the name?

Did you see any signs for the Hands On desks?

- Yes: 46%
- No: 54%

Over half of the people who visited Hands On desks did not see signs for them. The need for better signage emerged as a recommendation from the evaluation undertaken in 2004. In response to the question “Did you notice the signboard next to the desk”, 46% answered ‘Yes’. 54% answered ‘No’. Unfortunately, this has not improved significantly. Across the different rooms, the desk in Roman Britain (Room 49) seems particularly problematic. Less than one third of visitors (31%) saw signs for the desk compared to an average of 49% across the other 4 desks surveyed.

‘I didn’t see the sign actually. I just noticed that people were touching it and got the idea what they were probably doing.’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it could be higher couldn’t it? Higher and bolder.’ Visitor vox pop

Did the sign attract you to the desk?

- Yes: 43%
- Didn’t see signs: 56%
- No: 3%

Visitor vox pop
Despite the fact that over half the visitors to the Hands On desks had not seen the signage, of the people that did, a very high percentage (93%) said that the sign attracted them to the desk.

‘I saw the sign with the orange Hands On. I did see people around the desk and I wondered what they were doing.’ Visitor vox pop

Despite this, some people felt that the signs could be improved.

‘More eye-catching. Maybe like jewels. Pictures of your hand touching.’
Visitor vox pop

‘There’s so much to look at in here, a sign that would seem obvious normally just blends into the background and you need to look for it.’ Visitor vox pop

Some visitors felt that signage throughout the Museum could be better.

‘You might put up something next to the Information Desk, because I don’t think, if I didn’t know it was there, I wouldn’t know.’ Visitor vox pop

‘It would be nice to have a sign outside this room, so that people can get drawn in here, so that would help.’ Visitor vox pop

‘Have a bigger sign, and a sign outside.’ Visitor vox pop

The 2004 evaluation recommended increasing usage among non-English speakers through using non-verbal, visual methods of communication. One visitor said:

‘I reckon it should be in other languages.’ Visitor vox pop

Did the sign assist you in finding the desk?

- **Yes** 81%
- **No** 19%

In addition to saying that the sign attracted visitors to the desk, 81% said that the sign assisted them in finding the desk.
The desk in Room 49 (Roman Britain) was sign which fewest visitors said assisted them in finding the Hands On desk (63%).

Did the sign clearly indicate what the desks were about?

- No: 12%
- Yes: 88%

A similarly high proportion of visitors (88%) agreed that the sign clearly indicated what the desks were about.

However, some visitors felt that there was room for improvement.

- ‘There could be a little bit more publicity. Whatever slogan you use to attract people could explain a little bit more.’ Visitor vox pop
- ‘I think people would be more likely to come up if they knew that you could touch.’ Visitor vox pop

Commenting on the name ‘Hands On’, visitors said:

- ‘Very appropriate. It does what it says on the box!’ Visitor vox pop
- ‘It says what it is really. You can touch it, and get information about it.’ Visitor vox pop

7.3 Is the design of the desk attractive?

Overall, visitors did not seem concerned about the appearance of the desks.

- ‘You could have some writing about it. You could have some writing a bit colourful. You need sort of patches of it. Like something here, and something here.’ Visitor vox pop

However, one couple suggested that better lighting at the desks might improve the visitor experience.

- ‘Better lighting in these areas would be good as well.’ Visitor vox pop
“So you can properly see the objects. If you maybe had an angle-poise lamp on there, that you could maybe shine on it, that would be better wouldn’t it?” Visitor vox pop
8

Desk Volunteers

8.1  Are visitors aware that volunteers staff the desks?

One third of visitors to Hands On desks were aware that the desks are staffed by volunteers. The level of awareness at the desk in the Enlightenment Gallery (Room 1) was slightly higher than average at 41%.

8.2  How satisfied are visitors with the performance of volunteers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How satisfied are you with the service given by the desk staff?</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Room 1</th>
<th>Room 2</th>
<th>Room 24</th>
<th>Room 49</th>
<th>Room 68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied or dissatisfied</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very satisfied</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly all (98%) of visitors to Hands On desks were satisfied with the service given by desk staff.

‘The lady upstairs. She was very good.’ Visitor vox pop

‘They draw people in. They’re very very good.’ Visitor vox pop
‘That lady’s quite knowledgeable as well, they tell you different facts about things, that you might not pick up from some of the other things.’ Visitor vox pop

‘She answered absolutely everything that we needed to know. Little hesitant now and again, because she obviously was recalling but it was lovely.’ Visitor vox pop

Overall, the reaction to Hands On desk volunteers was very positive. One visitor said:

‘The fact you’ve got volunteers here to do it makes people more likely to [take part].’ Visitor vox pop
Engagement

9.1 Why do some visitors not engage?

Some visitors were nervous at the thought of touching ancient and valuable items.

‘Everything’s so old, and everything’s taken care of so well, it makes you feel a bit nervous to actually be holding it ... but then once you’ve picked up the first thing, and that was a replica ‘Oh that’s totally fine to pick up, I’ll have a good touch of it’ I do want to take care of it.’ Visitor vox pop

Clearly the role of the volunteer is key, here, in order to entice the visitor to the desk. More confident and experienced visitors do not need as much encouragement. For a tentative visitor, once they have handled one object, they are likely to grow in confidence.

9.2 Do visitors feel a difference when handling replica as opposed to real objects?

‘Not at all. The replicas are brilliant.’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it’s an excellent idea because my friend said everything’s in glass cases, and there’s nothing like actually touching these things, and feeling them. I know it’s a replica, but you’re actually touching the equivalent of the real thing.’ Visitor vox pop

‘I’m not bothered if it is a replica, because I can now go and look at the real thing, so that’s fine.’ Visitor vox pop

However, some visitors did express a preference for holding the real thing rather than a replica.

‘I didn’t want to hold that really ... because it wasn’t the real thing.’ Visitor vox pop
9.3 Is it possible to identify the type of objects with which visitors engage most strongly?

A range of different kinds of items is important. However, visitors seemed to have the strongest rapport with items that connected them to people from the past.

‘I think the little man yes. It’s just someone’s carved, the amount of time it must have taken to do that. I was saying a lot of these things, people obviously commission them, and I often wonder if they live long enough to see the finished result!’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

‘I quite liked the bowl, because to me you can see how somebody had made it.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

Objects that were very simple also had an appeal. However, if something was very old then visitors seemed particularly drawn to it.

‘I think the beads ... The young lady said it was the oldest thing there, and it wasn’t clay. I thought it was, so it was brilliant.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

‘The man, the little man. Well they were all nice, the little man, and also the fingerprints that were on the back of the pot...the edge of the pot. It’s nice to know...a long time ago... to be able to see it and imagine.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

‘The knife ... It’s very, very, very old. It’s the oldest thing we’ve touched ever.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 1

‘I like the hand axes. Very crude though they are. They talk about them being used by a Stone Age man 600,000 years ago. Just to handle one makes you feel more in touch with what they were actually doing.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 2

Some visitors liked the puzzle element of one of the items.

‘I thought the piece of pot, and trying to figure by that size handle, how big the pot would have been. And in a way she was describing what part of the pot it was.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

‘It’s good to have a bit of mystery to it so you can say well Was it a child’s toy? Was it a chess piece? Was it used to commemorate someone? ... and you can have to do the research yourself.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

Others were keen on objects that reflected a personal interest or hobby.
‘It’s been very interesting full stop, but the donkey chain ... just because of my interest in horses.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 49

‘The xxx of Thomas Beckett being murdered, because I’ve just finished reading the book and been touring castles. It keeps coming back to me all the time, but you can’t really have a favourite in these things can you. This was found at xxx in France where we’ve just been as well. Visitor vox pop, Room 2

Finally, one visitor expressed their pleasure and being able to have the sensory experience of touching an item.

‘To look at it, it’s just looked like ... a lump of rock, but you can touch it. It feels like a pet that moulds into your hands.’ Visitor vox pop, Room 2

9.4 Are the desks increasing visitor engagement & encouraging them to look at more objects?

It is difficult to say with any certainty whether looking at items at Hands On desks encourages visitors to look at more exhibits.

![Pie chart showing percentages of visitors staying in the gallery](image)

However, the observations undertaken show that on average, 61% of visitors who used a Hands On desk will stay in the gallery afterwards. This would suggest that visitors want to see more.

‘If we saw an area which had something to do with what we just learnt about we might look at it a bit more than we would have done recently.’

Visitor vox pop

The desk in Room 49 (Roman Britain) has the highest rate of visitors remaining in the gallery having used the desk at 72%.
10 Outcomes

10.1 What outcomes do visitors get from using the desks?

The main benefits visitors got from visiting Hands On desks were:

- New knowledge: 48%
- Insight: 22%
- Interesting personal encounter: 19%
- Question answered: 7%
- Other: 4%

Among the answers given as 'Other', being able to touch came out as the strongest outcome.

'Chance to allow 3 year olds to touch and ask about objects.' Visitor survey

'Wonderful to be able to experience the physical feel of objects.' Visitor survey

'Touch of the objects – physical connection.' Visitor survey
Thinking about 'Hands On' desk, what do you feel you got out of this experience today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Room 1</th>
<th>Room 2</th>
<th>Room 24</th>
<th>Room 49</th>
<th>Room 68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I used facilities such as the shop/cafe/toilet/restaurant</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I visited one of the major attractions in the region</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent time with other people in a nice place</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encouraged children’s interest in history</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I improved my own knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a personal/academic/professional interest in the subject</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I travelled back in time</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gained a deeper insight into the subject</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I experienced awe-inspiring/fascinating/beautiful things or places</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was moved emotionally</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt a strong sense of personal connection</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I escaped or recharged my batteries</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I stimulated my own creativity</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reflected and contemplated</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improving knowledge and understanding (63%) and gaining a deeper insight into the subject (46%) emerged as the aspects with the highest outcome levels.
### What is the MAIN thing you got out of 'Hands On' desk today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Room 1</th>
<th>Room 2</th>
<th>Room 24</th>
<th>Room 49</th>
<th>Room 68</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I used facilities such as the shop/cafeteria/toilet/restaurant</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I visited one of the major attractions in the region</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent time with other people in a nice place</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encouraged children’s interest in history</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I improved my own knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a personal/academic/professional interest in the subject</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I travelled back in time</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gained a deeper insight into the subject</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I experienced awe-inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things or places</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was moved emotionally</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt a strong sense of personal connection</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I escaped or recharged my batteries</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I stimulated my own creativity</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reflected and contemplated</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main outcome levels for visitors to Hands On desks were improving knowledge and understanding (34%) and encouraging children’s interest in history (16%) followed by gaining a deeper insight into the subject. Improving knowledge and understanding aligns to the profile of visitors to Hands On desks (the second largest segment being Self developers at 23%). Encouraging children’s interest in history fits with the largest segment being Families at 34%.

Touching items resonated strongly with visitors and made them feel that the relevant period in history was being brought alive.

*‘The sense of history, and that’s just overwhelming. I can handle something that somebody made all those years ago. I learnt about that at school, and now I can touch it. It’s unbelievable that I can touch.’ Visitor vox pop*
‘I think really it’s just given me a better understanding.’ Visitor vox pop

‘The lovely thing about it is that is makes it alive, as opposed to it being a xxx museum sort of thing.’ Visitor vox pop

‘Being able to handle and have the explanation. It’s wonderful to see, but to be able to touch makes it come alive.’ Visitor vox pop

‘It makes you feel of the lives people were having at that time doesn’t it. And now in modern days we take it for granted.’ Visitor vox pop

10.2 Do desks increase visitor enjoyment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can you indicate whether the desk(s):</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>From which Hands On desk did you get this questionnaire?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Room 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased the quality of your visit</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased the quality of your visit</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made no difference</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly all visitors to Hands On desks (96%) said that the experience increased the quality of their visit.

‘It made our visit much more pleasant.’ Visitor vox pop

‘It really brings it to life.’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it’s enhanced it.’ Visitor vox pop

One visitor summed it up rather well.

‘It’s something to talk about. You’ve touched a 350,000 year old knife today.’

Visitor vox pop
Conclusions & Recommendations

More UK visitors use Hands On desks

61% of visitors to Hands On desks are from the UK compared to 25% for the British Museum as a whole. Lack of use by overseas visitors suggests that language may be an issue. However, sight and touch are 2 key senses involved in participating in Hands On desk activities, the actual language barrier may be a lot less than is perceived. Desk volunteers need to consider how they communicate messages to visitors in order to maximise the use of non-verbal communication. The lack of use by overseas visitors may also be related to signage. This will be addressed later in this chapter.

Hands On desks attract a higher percentage of families

Hands On desks attract a higher percentage of Families (34% compared with 12% for the Museum as a whole). The Museum could see this as an opportunity to inform this group of visitors about other events or activities that may be of interest to them. Families clearly welcome the opportunity of interacting with objects in the Museum’s collection, enjoying the explanations and tailored interpretation provided by Hands On desks.

Visitors do not spend long at the Hands On desks

80% of visitors spent less than 5 minutes at the Hands On desks. 10% spent 6-10 minutes. 3% spent 11-20 minutes. Although a large majority of visitors spend less than 5 minutes at Hands On desks, the statistics show that some visitors are prepared to spend longer.

Encouraging visitors to go to more than one Hands On desk

58% of visitors went to one Hands On desk. However, 43% of visitors went to more than one desk. This suggests that having visited one desk, visitors are prepared to engage with subsequent desks and may well welcome the introduction of more Hands On desks offering interactive experiences with a wider range of the Museum’s artefacts and exhibits. The qualitative data collected suggests that visitors are looking for a ‘different’ experience. An opportunity to handle a wider variety of objects would provide this.
Some desks are more popular than others

The Hands On desks in Room 1 (Enlightenment Gallery) and 49 (Roman Britain) are the most popular. The desk in Room 2 (Temporary exhibitions) is the least popular. It is difficult to say with any certainty why this is. Factors such as where the gallery is, where the desk is in the gallery, objects on offer and the ‘performance’ of the volunteer may be factors in a visitor’s decision to stop at the desks. The Museum needs to ensure that the highest levels of consistency possible exist between desks in order to try to minimise disparities between the popularity of desks.

Most visitors decided to stop at the desks incidentally

94% of visitors decided to stop at the Hands On desks incidentally. Precise reasons for this are difficult to identify, although limited knowledge of the Hands On programme is the most likely cause and the fact that visitors don’t expect to come across them. 90% of visitors to desks found out about the desks on the day of their visit. The lack of pre-knowledge suggests that website mention, promotion and signage of the programme is not as good as it could be, especially as 58% of visitors to Hands On desks are repeat visitors.

The signage for the Hands On desks could be improved

54% of visitors did not see any signs for Hands On desks. Of the visitors who did see signs, 93% said the signs attracted them to the desk. This suggests that the design of the signage is effective but the number of signs may be insufficient and the placement of signs may be ineffective. The sign in Room 49 (Roman Britain) is particularly ineffective in assisting visitors in finding the desks compared to those in other galleries. Some visitors commented that the signs should be easier for foreign visitors to understand. Other visitors commented that the promotion and signposting of the Hands On programme from the main Information Desk should be increased.

Lack of knowledge of who the desks are staffed by

67% of visitors were not aware that the Hands On desks are staffed by volunteers. However, 98% of visitors are satisfied with the performance of volunteers, praising their knowledge and enthusiasm. One visitor said that visitors would be more likely to participate if they knew that the desks are staffed by volunteers.

Hands On desks increase peoples’ enjoyment

96% of visitors said that the Hands On desks increased the quality of their visit. Given this very high figure, the Museum could consider opening more
Hands On desks Evaluation

desks, increasing the hours they operate or running special one-off handling sessions with different objects.
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