

Museums and the Culture of Quality

Ferrara, Saturday 31 March 2001

Good Practice Makes Perfect.

The use of the TQM Model in the cultural sector: two case studies from the UK

Thank you for inviting me to speak this afternoon, it's a great pleasure to be here and I've greatly enjoyed hearing of the experiences of the other organisations which have been involved in using the TQM Model.

My talk today is primarily in three parts. First I would briefly like to set the scene by describing the current museum context in the UK. This will outline the major issues facing museums and describe some of the standards and accreditation schemes currently running in the UK in order to illustrate where the Total Quality Management scheme fits into the bigger picture and how it might be used in the future.

I will then describe my experience of using the model by describing 2 case studies from England where it was used to undertake full organisational reviews. The 2 case studies are quite different. The first involves a small Local Authority museum service, Wycombe Museum Service which used the model as the framework for a 'Best Value' review (I will explain more about this later). The second involved a major government funded national organisation, English Heritage, which is the Government's lead body for the historic environment in England. Our involvement with these two reviews was as an external verifier or independent assessor which I think has given us a valuable insight into how the model works and its impact.

The third part of my talk therefore looks at the model's strengths and weaknesses, the issues and problems surrounding the use of the model and how it might be improved or changed in the future. I would also like to raise some questions on how lessons learnt or the standards it supports might be incorporated into other schemes so that they can be applied on a wider, collective basis to the museum sector.

So what are the current issues facing museums in the UK? Broadly they separate into four main areas:

(1). Challenges for museums

1. The issue of Sustainability.

We have over 275 museums in the South East of England alone, ranging from small local volunteer run museums, large independent visitor attractions, to local authority services and internationally important

university museums, such as those in Oxford. All of them are facing issues of sustainability of one kind or another as they find themselves in an increasingly competitive environment fighting for visitors, resources, volunteers and funding.

2. The second challenge is closely linked, that of **funding**. This is true of the independent sector which is reliant on visitor income (admissions, catering, retailing) as well as of the local authority sector competing for local authority budgets against larger, statutory services. Added to this is the increasing competition for grants funding, such as that from the Heritage Lottery Fund, as funding bodies widen the eligibility criteria to allow more organisations to apply or target grants at specific project or priorities such as access or social inclusion work. The result is that it is increasingly difficult to find money to sustain, let alone enhance core activities and services.
3. The issue of standards and best practice is also key. Registration is the national minimum standard and all museums that want public recognition and funding aspire to it. However, it is not comprehensive or robust enough to be able to distinguish the acceptable from the exceptional and increasingly museums are expected not just to meet minimum standards or good practice but to aspire to best practice and to demonstrate that they provide a quality service.
4. This has led to the challenge of innovation and improvement as museums develop new and innovative services in order to retain existing users and attract new ones, and work to improve standards across the board to ensure their future.

Area Museum Councils have also been undergoing a period of change to respond to the changing needs of the museums that they serve. We used to be direct service providers of for example, conservation services but now concentrate on a more strategic advisory role in order to best support and represent the interests of museums. The main areas of work are listed here and I will highlight a few:

- strategic planning
- policy development
- advocacy – which requires a sound research base and up to date information
- Supporting and promoting standards and best practice
- Information – which must be up to date, accurate and targeted
- Funding through our own grant aid and increasingly through brokering larger projects and attracting project money into the region.
- We have always been involved in professional skills development through training but are now undertaking more and more work with museum assessments and development initiatives

(2) What do we need?

What we all have in common as a result of these new challenges and ways of working is the need for **information**.

- We all need an **informed overview of the sector** in the form of **accessible and comprehensive data**
- **We need reference to Standards and Best practice guidelines** (nationally and professionally accredited and accepted) which are necessary to guide museum development and ensure that standards are not just maintained but improved over time.
- **Benchmarks and comparative data** as well as **Performance indicators** are also increasingly important for museums of every type which need verified evidence of their performance and standards of attainment, to assist their own development planning and as a measure of external assessment.
- In order to collect all this information and ensure comparability, rigor, transparency and objectivity in our assessments and analysis we need a range of **diagnostic tools and accreditation schemes**. These should provide both qualitative and quantitative data as well as referring to recognised standards and best practice.

(3) Current Schemes

So what do we have in the UK? There are a number of schemes, some specifically for museums, some for visitor attractions (including museums) and some for business or industry with more or less applicability for the cultural sector. I have listed some of them here and you have already heard details of the main museum schemes such as Registration and Mapping. As you can see the choice is bewildering and unfortunately most work on different principles and methodology which makes comparison between schemes difficult. The CHNTO scheme is a process benchmarking exercise. The Association of Large Visitor Attractions and Benchmarking for Visitor Attractions schemes concentrate on financial and visitor performance but do not assess collections management, governance or other issues. Best Value reviews are a statutory duty of Local Authorities. Best Value is defined as the 'continuous search by a local authority to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of all its services and activities for its community and other service users'.

The range statements found in Mapping are now also being extended to assess performance in key areas such as education and collections care. On top of all these schemes are business schemes such as ISO 9000, Chartermark (which assesses customer care practice and results) and Investors in People which

assesses human resources management and development. So which scheme is going to help you review and develop your organisation?

(4) 3 Key Questions

In order to decide we believe that there are 3 key questions which need to be asked. We aren't just looking at **how** are we doing (most schemes do that), but **why** have we got the results that we have and how do we make improvements or ensure that we are working towards good practice? Few of the above schemes provide answers to all these questions apart from Mapping for those areas it covers. The strength of the TQM Model is that it is designed to help organisations **identify not only what areas of their performance need most attention** but also what **level of improved performance** can realistically be achieved. In addition, by looking at processes and best practice that should be common to all successful organisations, the schemes can actually help guide museums in decisions on **how** to make improvements and **what** to prioritise. We believe that the TQM model is one of the few schemes that will give your organisation a comprehensive healthcheck.

(5) EFQM Excellence Model

Just as commercial and retailing operators are increasingly borrowing ideas from the arts, leisure and heritage sectors to compete more effectively, business management tools traditionally reserved for commercial enterprises are finding their way into the cultural and tourism sectors. The TQM Model is a perfect case in point. Most aspects of an organisation's business can be dissected, measured, compared examined objectively and ultimately improved through the process of benchmarking, assessment and learning from industry leaders and guidelines for good practice or excellence.

The overarching benefit of using the TQM Model is that it can provide both an **external customer focused** and **internal management- focused** basis on which to set priorities for action. It provides a structured, replicable approach to assessment and review, allowing priorities for action to be set and improvements to be tracked over time.

For the second part of my talk I will describe how the model was applied to two organizations in the UK. In both cases we worked with a company called Capita Consulting who has developed their own methodology for applying the business excellence model so I will also briefly outline the specific methodology used.

(6) Wycombe Museum

Wycombe Museum Service's mission is to 'provide a comprehensive local museum service enabling our collections, buildings and gardens to be enjoyed by the whole community from Wycombe District and from surrounding areas and by visitors from further afield. It aims to encourage interest, excite curiosity and promote understanding of the past, present and future of the people living in the Wycombe District'.

The museum serves a population of 164,000 and is situated in an historic building out of the town centre. The service manages the material heritage and culture of the district and provides a visitor attraction open seven days a week, plus educational, retail and information services, events and activities. Whilst the main activities are on site, the museum is also developing its outreach work and information services. It is a small to medium sized service with 17,000 visitors in 1999/2000. Although these are relatively modest figures it is worth noting that these have risen by over 300% in 10 years and are 30% up over 1999/00.

English Heritage

English Heritage is the government's lead body for the historic environment in England. It is an executive non-department Public Body sponsored by the Department of Culture Media and Sport. Its powers are set out in the National Heritage Act (1983) and it is funded principally by government - £114million in 2000/01 and with an income of £32 million. It has a central corporate services division based in London with nine principle regional offices corresponding to the Government's nine administrative regions, for example the South East, South West, West Midlands.

English Heritage is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters concerning the conservation of England's historic built environment. It is the largest source of non-Lottery grant funding for historic buildings and ancient monuments, conservation areas, archaeology, cathedrals and churches. It is also responsible for the mainenance, repair and presenation of over 400 properties in public ownership or guardianship. In addition, since its merger with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monument of England, it is also responsible for compiling and maintaining the National Monuments Record as the national rchive and information base of historic buildings and ancient monuments.

(7) Aim of reviews

The aim of both organisational reviews were to:

- Assess the performance of the organisation and/or individual services compared to a model of excellence. So in the case of Wycombe it was specifically to assess the museum service within the larger council structure as part of a Best Value review. In the case of English Heritage it was a full corporate review rather than departmental or regional office reviews.
- Both wanted to identify areas for improvement.
- Both wanted to ensure a customer focus to service delivery
- Both aimed to review current corporate and performance planning mechanisms and how they are implemented at a service level
- Overall, then the model aims to provide a framework for helping the organisations to undertake a quality service review and set priorities for action.

In addition, to all the aims just stated Wycombe also had specific aims related to the Best Value review being undertaken by the council. These aims reflected the common framework for Best Value known as the 4 C's - **challenge** the need for a service, **compare** it with others, **consult** with local people and users and **compete** by demonstrating that different options for service delivery have been considered.

(8) Summary of methodology

The methodology involved self-assessment, external verification, a consensus meeting and improvement planning. To help the self-assessment process Capita have developed a detailed self-assessment manual which is set out in 9 sections corresponding to the 9 criteria of the model. The manual includes guidance notes for conducting the review as well as helpful prompts for the type of evidence you should be providing to support your case. These prompts for evidence reflect good practice in whichever area you are scoring and can help identify where improvements can be made. The notes are also supported by hints and tips for helping you complete the review successfully. In addition, structured interviews were also conducted with key personnel. A scoring template is then provided which enables you to score your results. This whole process, which they have called CompassLG is supported by a specially developed software available on CD Rom. This enables you to complete your assessment on screen and all the scoring is automatically calculated for you.

The organisation is then subject to a separate external review known as **verification**. This is based on a review of the documentary evidence, on the reading of the self-assessments teams completed manual as well as on more interviews with key personnel and stakeholders. The verification panel does not see the

self-assessment teams scoring results. The verification team then also completes the assessment manual and scores each criterion.

The self-assessment team and verification team then comes together for a consensus meeting to discuss the nine criteria, their assessment and scoring in detail. After discussion, this leads to an agreed action plan identifying areas of strength and those for improvement. In addition, decisions must also be taken as to how this is to be implemented and monitored. Further details of the outcomes of the self-assessment exercise and verification are included in your handouts.

So what were the result for the two organisations? **(9. Score card)**

They were allocated scores against a set point range – as detailed in this chart. Both fell within the 25-45 bracket indicating that they had reached an acceptable practice overall, though some areas scored below this and some were in the good practice approaching excellence bracket. Areas for improvement were also identified and action plans developed to raise standards. In addition, both organisations are considering how to put in place monitoring processes and developing organisational or local performance indicators to track future progress. It is important to stress that the score is not an end in itself, the score alone will not result in service improvements. Delivering sustainable improvement requires more than just accurate analysis – more than the setting and monitoring of key performance indicators. It requires that the needs of stakeholders be met as effectively and efficiently as possible, at the lowest possible cost and highest quality and with every employee playing his or her part to the full. A continuous monitoring process must therefore be put in place to enable organisations to identify what has gone well and what needs improving. Ultimately this should lead to continuous performance improvement.

(10). Wycombe Museum Service

Overall the museum service came out very well from the review. A number of particular strengths were identified, the five main areas being leadership, people management, consultation, customer focus and satisfaction and benchmarking or performance review.

For the purposes of the review four main leaders were identified from the Chair of Leisure and Community Services, the Head of Leisure Services to the Tourism and Culture Manager and finally the Museums Officer. There was good evidence that the Museums Officer was a model of excellence for the service, had an approachable and open management style, encouraged innovation and creativity in her team and

effectively motivated and supported staff. There was clearly a high level of managerial pride and political support for the service but the challenge was to ensure that it actively promoted its own purpose and mission to the council as a whole. Although the service was generally perceived as 'a good thing' it needed to clarify the contribution it made to council policies and objectives in order to better safeguard its future and secure resources.

The management approach within the museum service was very good both towards both paid and volunteer staff. As a result the 'people' results were very good and approaching excellence. People resources were planned, managed and improved; competencies were identified and developed, people were involved and empowered and achievements were recognised. The service is unusual for a local authority service in that it benefits from the work of over 30 volunteers who staff the front of house functions and have all been trained in customer care. As a result the museum has been awarded a Chartermark for excellence in public service.

Another strength was the regular and open consultation with a range of stakeholders with changes being introduced to the service as a result. The clear customer focus resulted in positive visitor feedback and comments and a continuing upward trend in visitor figures during a time when most of the region's museums were experiencing a decline in visitor numbers.

Finally, the museum service is unusual in that it has taken part in a range of benchmarking schemes and performance reviews in order to set targets and assess and track performance over time. They have participated in five different museums specific schemes, **not** including the EFQM Model & regular visitor research, and therefore hold very good information on how they compare to other services as well as trend information on their own performance

In terms of areas for improvement – there were 6 main areas identified. Beyond the Museums Officer, improvement was required in line manager management and leadership. This was a difficult issue to tackle but extremely important if the service was to develop and improve. As the result of the review there have been great improvements to the leadership issues as the Museums Officer has now been promoted to the Leisure Management Team thereby joining weekly meetings with the Head of Leisure and other senior managers.

I have already mentioned the need for better advocacy for the service within the council. Strategy and planning were also areas targeted for improvement primarily as the museums did not have an overarching development plan or strategy (though to be fair this was delayed pending the results of the EFQM review). The service has now produced a development plan and has revised its Marketing Strategy in consultation with the council's Marketing Manager.

Partnership and stakeholders – There was a need for the museum service to assess the wide range of partnerships they had and better plan their management in future. Arrangements tended to be ad hoc and the museum is now looking at how it can build longer term, sustainable partnerships.

Processes – there was evidence that processes were designed, managed and improved to increase value for customers however processes needed to be further developed to ensure benchmarking outcomes were used to improve services and the results clearly measured and tracked. A review of arrangements with internal service providers was also a priority to maximise available assistance to the museum service.

Performance indicators – Although performance indicators and targets were set for the service, the review highlighted the need for new and more challenging indicators to measure customer & society results. Overall did well and raised profile in council.

English Heritage

The overall score for English Heritage fell within the 25-45 bracket, that generally considered to be acceptable. English Heritage's performance demonstrated some instances of good practice, in particular in communication and implementation of policy and strategy, financial probity and the use of key performance indicators for some areas of the service. It also demonstrated that acceptable approaches were being deployed in all the enabler and two of the results criteria, customer results and key performance results.

However, there was also considerable room for improvement in each of the 9 areas if English Heritage is to demonstrate good practice across the board and if it aspires to reach levels of excellence. In some instances scores were sufficiently low to indicate urgent action was required, in particular in how people and society results are monitored and used, / how policies and strategies are developed, reviewed and updated, / how partnerships and stakeholders are identified and managed and developed, and the extent to which people are involved and empowered. The approaches used to bring about process improvement

also needed to be reviewed, as did the development of broader performance indicators to cover the whole range of activities which English Heritage undertakes. Surprisingly, no thought had been given to including an assessment of the management of heritage and cultural resources (including buildings, collections and sites) yet clearly this is central to the mission of English Heritage. It is surprisingly easy to miss if following the standard sections of the Business model and obviously is an area that needs addressing.

Since their corporate assessment, English Heritage has been extending and refining the use of the excellence model within the organisation. They have introduced a truncated form of self-perception assessment and action planning to some of the corporate teams and business units as well as Marketing and one of the regions. They will look at how it might be extended across the whole organisation in the future. Those involved in the self-assessment panel have also reported that they have taken a more active role in continuous improvement in their own workplaces. English Heritage's Head of Business Review will be facilitating an action planning day to develop improvement programmes to take forward the recommendations of the review over the next 12 months. The main themes are likely to be better use of partnerships and stakeholder relationships, ensuring better knowledge and management of key processes and focussing on getting the correct measures of organisational success in place. Only after these have been carried forward will a true before and after scenario emerge.

So what have we learnt about the model and its use?

The following comments reflect our own experiences and the views of the 2 organisations directly involved

Strengths

- Overall both were positive about the benefits of the scheme. It is an holistic approach to performance improvement covering all areas of museum organisation, planning, management and results. It allow an organisation to take a step back and review itself as a whole – this aspect is particularly useful for those curators who sometimes get tunnel vision about collections/displays and forget to view the museum as a business of many interrelated parts. Unlike other existing museum schemes it also covers sensitive areas such as management and leadership which are difficult to assess objectively but which we all know can make or break an organisation. I believe that this is an area whose importance has been underrated in the past but is now being acknowledged as critical to the success of an organisation.

- Diagnostic capacity – it tells you how you are doing, why you have the results you have and indicates how to make improvements.
- It forces organisations to collect data on their performance which will enable them to compare themselves with others and track changes over time.
- Self- review and assessment leads to greater organisational ownership as well as being good professional development for staff involved
- It is consultative
- It benefits from external feedback and professional input either from museum or business professionals during the verification process. In some cases this led to brainstorming to inform the future development plans.
- It encourages continuous review and improvement
- And leads to phased improvements and action plans.
- It is outputs and outcomes focussed rather than concentrating on processes
- It highlights good practice and can therefore be a PR boost if you do well
- Importantly it also references other schemes so work and time invested in other accreditation processes can be used as supporting evidence in a TQM review. For example, Registration under Resources and partnership management, Chartermark under customer results.

Weaknesses

- Time and paper intensive. Here is it important to distinguish between EFQM model and the methodology used to implement it. The Compass system developed by Capita was very paper and labor intensive particularly with its emphasis on providing reviewable paper based evidence for the verification team. It is not necessarily a good use of time to provide evidence in that way and more could have been made of interviews. The joke went that it was a better assessment of filing systems than of organisational performance!
- The approach places the emphasis on current service providers and users and more thought needs to be given to future users and current non-users – a key issue for museums
- There is little emphasis on brainstorming or rapid innovation, setting out as it does to identify areas for improvement based on existing practice. This is not necessarily a bad thing but makes it weak during Best Value reviews which must include an element of 'challenge'. In addition, although the model is strong on process it doesn't necessarily help in formulating aims and objectives – it assumes that these

are already in place. For most organisations this is true but I can see cases, particularly within the LA sector, where corporate objectives may not yet have been set.

- The Process and Partnership & Resources enabler sections should be reviewed to allow for all the collections management and site/heritage and stewardship aspects of a cultural organisation's work. This is after all central to their mission and perhaps thought should also be given to including them in Key Performance results.
- While it may be easy for commercial business to distinguish between results and social impact, it is difficult for many museums and cultural organisations to separate out business, customer and society results especially in relation to community and outreach work or social inclusion. However, it can be done given enough thought and planning to clearly state your aims and targets from the outset.
- More thought could also be given to guidance on separating out corporate and individual service results. The very good or very poor performance of one section could skew the whole organisational result and therefore needs to be considered.
- The last and relatively minor point is on leadership and management responsibility. The assessment has to be very clear about lines of responsibility and 'where the buck stops' in order to distinguish both good and poor performance up the management scale, as was the case at Wycombe.

ISSUES

- If the model is to be applied more widely then I believe that a shortened self-assessment and action planning process is required. This would also negate the need for employing expensive consultants.
- As I have already said there must be more emphasis on management and stewardship work relating to the cultural heritage.
- Our involvement as verifiers from the cultural sector highlighted the usefulness of using external assessors with an understanding of the sector and its work. The business consultants would never have identified many instances of good or poor practice relating to cultural or heritage issues and practice as they are not generally applicable to the business sector.
- Organisational commitment is key and staff from a number of different levels and departments should be involved in order to get a rounded overview of the whole organisation.
- Performance indicators and benchmarking are critical to success in the this type of review yet the cultural sector has relatively few nationally or even locally accepted indicators or comparator data on which to draw. The setting of performance indicators to assess qualitative outcomes, for example in education work, has proved enormously difficult and this is an area which needs to be addressed

nationally. In our review we drew on what little information there was nationally, the Audit Commission pi's (very broad, ie. Number of fully Registered museums, number of users) and those suggested during a review of 'efficiency and effectiveness of the national museums'.

- Whereas many organisations are able to score reasonably well on the enabler criteria, which assess process, most find it difficult to achieve similar scores for the result's criteria. This is because the result's criteria only recognises numerical measures of performance against historical trend data, targets that have been set, comparisons that have been made and which are shown to have been caused by what the service area is actually doing through its enablers. Traditionally museums have not been very good at this. Confusion can arise because of the belief that the mere presence of a result should yield a score. This is in fact not the case unless results can be measured against trends and targets, in other words more than just a baseline position statement. Museums which are in fact therefore doing rather well may score badly in this section because of the lack of historical information, perhaps thought should be given to assessing current performance both without and without trend data.
- Finally, perhaps consideration should be given to the different weightings used within the model to reflect the different business objectives of cultural organisations.

Way Forward – general thoughts

- We will be encouraging the individual take up of the scheme, perhaps looking to support groups of museums wanting to undertake reviews, so that they can support and help each other. We are therefore very interested in any group who has developed a shortened or simplified version of the review process tailored to museums.
- In order to provide relatively low cost external verifiers it may be possible to train a core group of museum professionals to act as independent assessors who could then carry out this role for each other at less expense than commercial consultants.
- We are looking at how we can incorporate lessons learnt and best practice into our own assessments and reviews eg. HLF where this type of assessment is more rigorous than theirs.
- We will also look at how the best practice lessons learnt could be passed on to members through information briefings and other means.
- We will be pursuing the development of national performance indicators with relevant organizations and are looking at extending the benchmarking club in the region to more members and perhaps encouraging them to undertake this kind of wider self assessment.

- Finally, I think it may also be worth considering which areas could usefully be added to the current Mapping scheme to provide a more holistic analysis of museum performance. However, given that all regions haven't even done the basic mapping yet I suspect that this may be a while off. Perhaps therefore it is up to those of us who have done it to look at how it can be expanded in the future to provide an even better, and more comprehensive assessment of performance and success?

S/Sophia/best value/museums and the culture of quality final talk