

Andrew Lovett

Chief Executive, Black Country Living Museum

Vice-Chair, Association of Independent Museums
United Kingdom

AIMS OF RESEARCH

The overall aim of the research was to understand the experience of museums that have moved from free admission to charging, or charging to free admission, or to 'hybrid' models, and to investigate different pricing strategies and their impact; including:

- i. impact on visitor numbers
- ii. impact on diversity of visitors
- iii. overall impact on income including the affect on secondary spend and spontaneous donation
- iv. impact on reputation and relationships with stakeholders, community, members, etc.
- v. lessons learnt to share with other museums

KEY FINDINGS

- There are no defining characteristics that distinguish charging or free-entry museums, and the picture is much more complex than often assumed, since one in three independent museums are free-entry and one in three local authority museums charge for admission.
- There is no direct link between the diversity of audiences and whether a museum charges for admission or not, with the pattern in terms of social mix being very similar. However, such a finding needs to acknowledge that the general social mix of museum visitors is not always representative of the wider social mix within their communities.
- Donations are more affected by a range of other factors than by whether museums charge for admission or not.
- There is no consistent relationship between levels of secondary spend and whether a museum charges admission, with other factors having much more influence. However, some evidence has emerged showing visitors to charging museums are more likely to have visited the shop (or used on-site catering), than visitors to free-entry museums.
- Dwell times are typically longer for museums that charge for admissions.
- The process of charging creates a focus for the visitor welcome and captures information about visitors. Where museums are free entry, alternative approaches are required for these elements.
- In making any changes it is especially important to communicate clearly with stakeholders and the local community about the reasons for the changes and to ensure that staff are positive and confident in explaining them to visitors.