

The magic bus

Museums and Galleries Inspiring Children



Magic Bus Final Evaluation (2006 – 2008)

RENAISSANCE NORTH EAST
museums for changing lives

Contents

1. Executive Summary **(3)**
2. Introduction **(4 - 5)**
3. Magic Bus 2006 – 2008 Review **(6 – 8)**
 - 3.1 The 2006 Pilot (6)
 - 3.2 Magic Bus 2007 (6 – 7)
 - 3.3 Magic Bus 2008 (7 – 8)
4. Implications of the Magic Bus **(9 – 25)**
 - 4.1 Enhancing co-operation between schools and museums (10 – 14)
 - 4.2 Promoting Generic Learning Outcomes Framework (15 – 22)
 - 4.3 Promoting Benefits of Object Based Learning (22 – 23)
 - 4.4 Informal Learning: Focus on Families (24 – 25)
5. Future of the Magic Bus: Recommendations **(26 – 30)**
 - 5.1 Improvement of the Project: Recommendations from 2007 and 2008 Evaluation (26 – 27)
 - 5.2 Development of the Project: Recommendations from Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey (27 – 30)
6. List of references **(31)**
7. Appendices **(32 – 44)**
 - Appendix 1 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Successful Engagement (33 – 34)
 - Appendix 2 The Magic Bus Song (by Tony Wilson) (35)
 - Appendix 3 Topic Options (36)
 - Appendix 4 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Questions (37 – 38)
 - Appendix 5 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Recommendations (39 – 44)

1. Executive Summary

Since 2006 the Magic Bus - an outreach project developed by the Education Team of the North East Regional Museums Hub - has visited schools in the North East region during the spring term. Over its three year operation it has brought thousands of children a positive experience of museum and gallery education.

According to evidence, for example data shows an increasing level of school involvement with museums; it seems to be that the Magic Bus project has successfully met its aim to raise awareness in schools of the wide ranging opportunities to engage with museum education services in the North East.

Consequently, it raises the questions of how museums and galleries can continue to inspire children in the North East and sustain positive trends of participation and also how the Magic Bus project can be developed in the future.

There are three main recommendations based on analysis of the annual evaluations from the project, the MLA participatory databases and recommendations of two main groups of stakeholders (schools and museums in the North East):

- Develop the Magic Bus project to encompass the secondary schools in the region,
- Develop the Magic Bus as a special transport service for schools from rural, isolated and socially deprived areas to help them to engage with museums, galleries and rural heritage sites more often,
- Establish a system of two-way co-operation between schools and museums. After the visit from the Magic Bus the school will either visit the venue represented with pupils or use it for INSET the following year. Funds will be available to subsidise the visits for schools that need it.

2. Introduction

The Magic Bus is an outreach project developed by the Education Team of the North East Regional Museums Hub.

The aim of the project is to raise awareness in schools of the wide ranging opportunities to engage with museum education services in the North East. MAGIC is an acronym for **M**useums and **G**alleries Inspiring **C**hildren.

'The Magic Bus came to school so ALL pupils accessed the resource, especially as a whole school assembly 'sparked' the children's' imagination' (Prudhoe Castle First).

Since 2006 the Magic Bus has visited schools in the North East region three times. During this time it has brought thousands of children a positive experience of museum and gallery education. All participants have appreciated a fun, interactive assembly, followed by handling sessions delivered by museum and gallery education professionals from across the region.

Since 2007 loans boxes containing museum objects linked to a variety of National Curriculum topics have been provided. Therefore, the classes that have not been able to participate in a taught session could still have a quality experience of a museum education service during a visit from the Magic Bus.

The Magic Bus also carried a wide range of information and promotional materials related to museum education services which were distributed to the schools. A member of staff from the Hub Education Team was always on hand to provide further information and expertise about museum education provision in the region. Schools were encouraged to hold a short staff meeting at the end of the day to ask any question they may have.

Improved public relations strategy (e. g. Magic Bus livery) increased level of press attention received by the project since 2006. Teachers involved in the project in 2008 already knew about the Magic Bus from previous years. Following MLA NE Database report (Table 1) there are 97% of all schools in the North East region who use museum and gallery education services.

Table 1 Non participating schools by LEA (20/05/2008)

LEA name	All schools	Participating schools	Percent
Darlington	44	41	93%
Durham	304	290	95%
Gateshead	94	94	100%
Hartlepool	40	39	98%
Middlesbrough	59	57	97%
Newcastle upon Tyne	104	103	99%
North Tyneside	82	81	99%
Northumberland	211	205	97%
Redcar and Cleveland	63	62	98%
South Tyneside	74	71	96%
Stockton-on-Tees	83	81	98%
Sunderland	119	116	97%
Grand total	1277	1240	97%

Source: MLA NE Participation Database

In other words, it seems to be that the Magic Bus project has successfully met its aim. Consequently, it raises the question of how museums and galleries can continue to inspire children in the North East to sustain such an enormous participatory level.

In order to answer such a question this report was commissioned to evaluate three years of the Magic Bus project and to explore possible options for the development of the project. Therefore, this report is based on the results of the annual evaluations from the project, the MLA participatory databases and recommendations of two main groups of stakeholders: schools and museums in the North East.

It also would be nice if you opened the Magic Bus up to every school. Many schools had heard about the Magic Bus and wanted it to visit them. It could be a chance to reward schools who often visit museums and galleries (The Museum of Hartlepool and Hartlepool Art Gallery).

3. Magic Bus 2006 – 2008 Review

3.1 *The 2006 Pilot*

The 2006 pilot project involved taking a branded double-decker bus to schools across the North East region. During 11 weeks (January till April) of the pilot project 30 staff representing 27 of the region's museums and galleries delivered 'taster' sessions of their education programmes under the banner of the Magic Bus in 49 schools to children from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4. On weekends the bus travelled around the region to museums, Sure Start and town centres to promote family learning opportunities provided by museums and galleries.



In total the pilot project engaged over 10,700 children in organised visits to schools and 14,000 including weekend activities. The pilot project was well received and feedback was generally very positive. However, due to sustainability and quality of the next phase of the Magic Bus project some changes were necessary.

3.2 *Magic Bus 2007*

Following the evaluation of the pilot project the Magic Bus 2007 project was targeted specifically at primary schools which were identified by MLA North East as being low or non participatory with the further aim of providing a positive first experience of museum education to those schools. During shorter period (9 weeks; January to March) the project had 30 staff representing 26 of the region's museums and galleries delivering sessions in 39 schools. Programme in schools had a clear structure and participants' expectations were managed in advance.

The project was not run on weekends but offered Sure Start Centres, Family Centres and Nurseries the opportunity to book a visit from the Magic Bus during the February half term holiday

(structured sessions were co-ordinated by the Hub Education Teams' Family Learning Officer).

After the problems with using external companies to hire, wrap, drive and garage the vehicle for the pilot, the Magic Bus vehicle was a fully liveried mini bus hired through Newcastle City Council Fleet Services in 2007. The Magic Bus livery was professionally designed (Projector Brand Communications) and used objects from Tyne and Wear Museums collections to more clearly identified the project as a museum initiative. A professional driver was employed to drive the bus for the length of the project.

In total the Magic Bus 2007 engaged over 7,300 children in organised visits to schools and a further 500 children in visits to Sure Start Centres, Family Centres and Nurseries during half term. Having direct control of the vehicle and driver were key factors to the project running smoothly. Although the Magic Bus project worked well and ran more efficiently in 2007 than the pilot project the year before, there were still some areas for improvement.

3.3 Magic Bus 2008

While the Magic Bus project had already ran successfully for two years it was acknowledged during the evaluation that there were still primary schools that had either not engaged or had only one recorded engagement with museums in the North East of England. So it was decided to carry out the project for another year. Schools which were identified by the MLA North East as being low or non participatory were sent a letter by sub-region inviting them to take part and were allocated places on a first come first served basis.

Then the Magic Bus allowed 34 staff representing 22 of the region's museums and galleries to deliver 'taster' sessions in 41 schools during 9 weeks (January to March) at the beginning of 2008.

'The magic bus visited Eslington in April 2008. The children engaged brilliantly in all the activities and really gained from the experience. For our children in a special school setting who do not have the opportunity to visit museums with their families, this was an invaluable experience' (Eslington, 2008).

The family learning sessions during the February Half term were booked in advance but were not as formal as school visits with the emphasis being that museums are fun and exciting places for children and families to visit. The sessions took place in six of the regional libraries and in Durham Cathedral.

Although the Magic Bus project manager had had to leave before the Magic Bus 2008 started its travel across the region, the project was delivered successfully by part-time officers. Mostly, they built on previous experience and recommendations from the previous years evaluations. In terms of advance booking and communication with schools, organising and delivering sessions in schools, co-operation with museum and gallery staff as well as freelance artists, and having a direct control of the vehicle and driver the project ran smoothly and efficiently.

In total the Magic Bus 2008 engaged over 5,000 children in organised visits to schools and a further 200 children in family visits during the February Half term. Increasing level of press attention received by the project from the year 2006 and the fact that teachers already know about the Magic Bus from previous years was seen as evidence of the projects success. Moreover, some of the schools that had been identified as low or non participatory were revealed to visit the museums or galleries regularly or proclaimed to plan a visit.



4. Implications of the Magic Bus

Although the Magic Bus visited just 16% of all primary schools in the North East region, it might be argued that the impact of the project has been very important in four main areas in terms of advocacy for museum contribution to Lifelong learning strategy:

- Enhancing co-operation between museum, galleries and schools focused on learning opportunities (increasing number of school visits, use of loan boxes)
- Promoting Generic Learning Outcomes framework as a useful tool for reflecting impact of museum and gallery education (teachers' feedback of school sessions)
- Demonstration of the benefit of object based learning (handling sessions)
- Informal learning: focus on families (Family learning sessions)



4.1 Enhancing co-operation between schools and museums

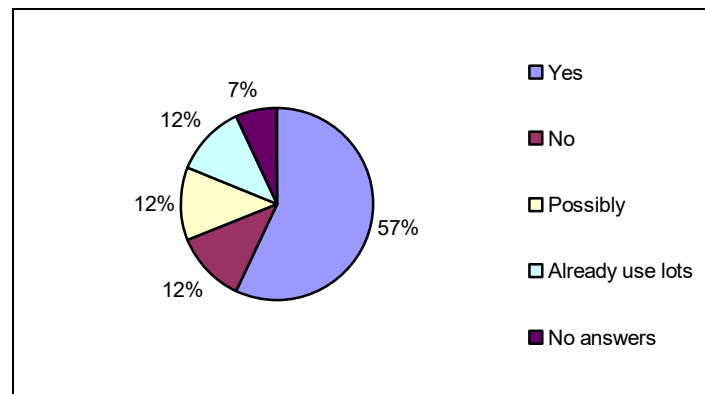
'On the back of Magic Bus we have had several schools making follow up visits and using other resources such as loan boxes. This happened this year with Teesville Infant School who contacted us following our visit to borrow resources. It is the personal contact with teachers and the children that makes the difference. We are no longer faceless' (Dorman Museum, 2008).

4.1.1 Magic Bus 2006 – 2008: Results of Annual Evaluations

In 2006 a large proportion of the teachers who responded in the evaluation process said that the Project had inspired them to use museum services more (see Chart 1).

Chart 1 Teacher Evaluation (2006, n=60)

Q. Has your visit from the Magic Bus inspired you to use museums more?



Several teachers responded that they did not previously realise that museums in the North East provided loans and outreach services and particularly appreciated the opportunity to access the information and knowledge of the staff on the bus.

Consequently, in the short time following the visit of the Magic Bus several schools used services at Beamish, Hatton Gallery, Kirkleatham Museum and the Museum of Antiquities. Teachers also indicated the intention to book visits to the Bowes Museum and to Segedunum Roman Fort.

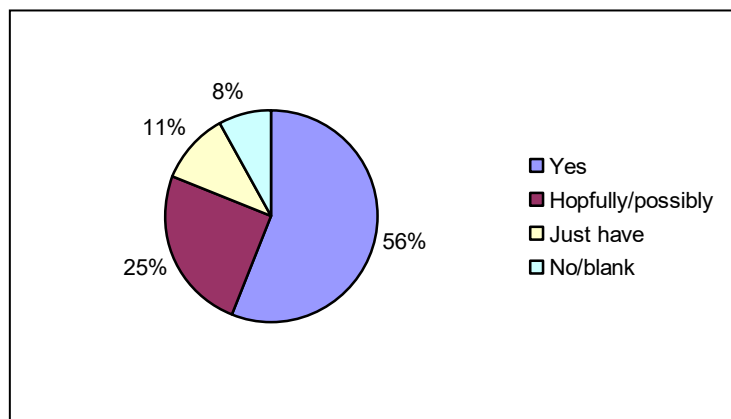
Teachers also provided a few thoughtful suggestions for how the museums services could be improved, including the possibility of extended projects with the museums involved, provision of follow up resources, and possible loans services from the bus.

Therefore, a selection of simple loans boxes which contained objects linked to a variety of National Curriculum topics had been provided in 2007 and 2008. Classes could borrow loans boxes during a visit from the Magic Bus. This ensured that every class had the opportunity to engage even in large schools and that the classes that did not get to participate in a taught session could still have a quality experience of a museum education service.

In 2007 more than three quarter of the teachers who responded during the evaluation process said that they anticipated visiting a museum or gallery with their classroom in the future (see Chart 2).

Chart 2 Teacher Evaluation (2007, n=64)

Q. Do you anticipate visiting a museum or gallery with your class in the future?



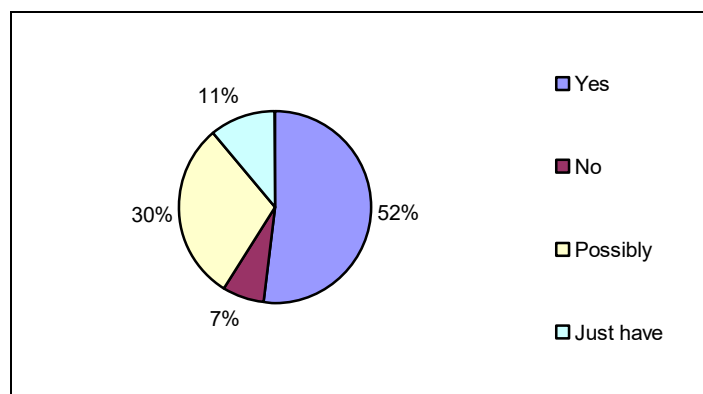
Following the suggestion from the museum educators meeting after the 2006 pilot of the Project the schools who had engaged with the Magic Bus were tracked in order to see the impact of the Project. It was particularly important in the case of primary schools targeted in 2007 as they were identified by MLA North East as being low or non participatory.

A list of the schools targeted by the Project was sent to all of the museums who were involved in delivering the sessions and providing information. The museums were asked to look at their recent bookings to see if any of the schools involved in the Project booked a visit. From the responses received from the museums approximately three months after the visit from the Magic Bus 41% of the schools involved in the Project booked further museum services since the end of the 2007 project.

In 2008 just over 80% of all 27 teachers who responded during the evaluation process expressed their intention to visit a museum or gallery with their pupils in future (see Chart 3).

Chart 3 Teacher Evaluation (2008, n=27)

Q. Do you anticipate visiting a museum or gallery with your class in the future?



A significant number of those, who anticipated a visit to the museum or gallery, mentioned as a main obstacle of doing so the increasing cost of bus transport and limited funds provided for school trips.

Among the institutions listed by schools to be visited or intended to be visited were Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, Green Dragon Museum, Wakefield Mining Museum, museum in Carlisle, Newcastle Keep and Beamish Open Air Museum.

4.1.2 MLA Participation Database: Tracking schools targeted by Magic Bus 2007

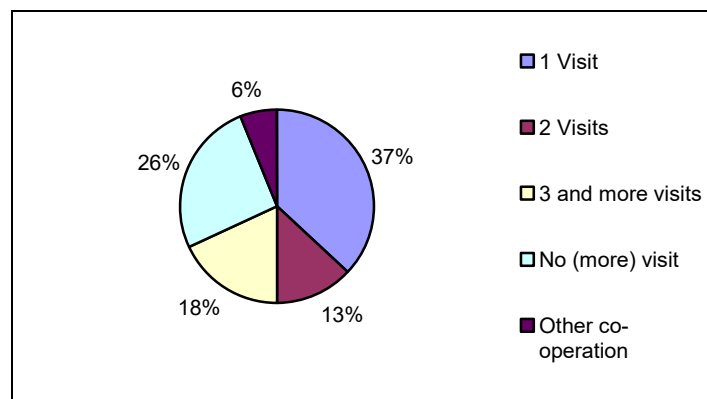
One of the suggestions from the museum educators meeting after the 2006 pilot of the Project was to find a way to try and track the schools who had engaged with the Magic Bus in order to see if the Project had any impact on them and the way that they used museum education services.

Several suggestions were made for voucher systems, museum stamps or discount vouchers. However, all of these ideas proved to be very complicated to work in practice. Therefore the system of tracking particular schools in museum and gallery booking records

was applied. Moreover, from Magic Bus 2007 project evaluation recommendation plans to continue to track schools involved in the Project long term using the MLA North East Participation Database.

Following a recommendation all 39 schools targeted in 2007 by Magic Bus were tracked using MLA NE Participation Database in May 2008. Although the only available data was until the end of 2007, it seems to be evident that 68% of 38 tracked schools were engaged with museums in the North East region after the visit from Magic Bus (see Chart 4).

Chart 4 Follow-up participation of schools targeted by Magic Bus 2007 by MLA NE Participation Database (May 2008, n=38)



Although the impact of Magic Bus was not strong enough in the case of ten schools (26%). The majority of the schools used the service of facilitated or self-help visits at least once. A significant number of schools (18%) visited various museums in the region more than three times. There are also some examples of regular co-operation between schools and one particular museum. According to the data only a few schools borrowed loan boxes or used outreach programme.

4.1.3 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Successful Co-operation

'I went to The Links Primary School, and they have since been to the Museum for a visit. When I went to the School the teachers told me they hadn't even thought about studying Captain Cook, and so I was impressed to see a school changing it's planning around within the school year to incorporate Captain Cook into their planning' (Captain Cook Birthplace Museum, 2008).

In June 2008 both groups of main stakeholders of the Magic Bus project - schools and museums in the North East – were asked to share their experience about the most successful engagement with each other (see Appendix 1 for details). They were also asked to identify the reasons for such a success.

According to museum educators personal contact with teachers and children is essential to develop a good basis for co-operation. Projects with an interesting topic involving lots of different techniques and developing various skills are more likely to succeed as they support the cross-curricular approach which is popular in schools.

According to teachers there are many reasons that underpin successful engagement museums. These might be divided into four main groups:

- High level of interactivity – Educational programmes in the museum are seen to be successful if they provide first hand experiences for children, give children opportunities to research interests for themselves, involve drama and storytelling to engage and inform pupils and, overall, use varied and interesting activities suitable for all pupils.
- Uses of artefacts – Key roles of artefacts in museum education are recognised by teachers.
- Personality and skills of museum staff – The smiley, friendly, helpful, enthusiastic and knowledgeable adults running the programme help create stimulating learning environment in the museum. The involvements of staff, ability to inspire children and subject knowledge are identified as a ‘good tool for engaging the children’.

‘K. and M. were the best parts about the Magic Bus because they are kind and they were good at explaining what the objects were. T. was good when he sang a song because his guitar was very cool’ (Pupil’s comment, age: 9, 2008)

- Practical issues – Among the reasons that insure a successful engagement it was mentioned some practical issues such as support for the National Curriculum, efficiency of visit (‘very short travel distance + much to see and do’), enough space for children (‘room to move’) and mix of indoor and outdoor activities.

4.2 Promoting Generic Learning Outcomes Framework

4.2.1 Magic Bus Programme: Inspiring Learning for All

'I liked the fact that it was magic' (Pupil's comment, 2008)

As the MAGIC acronym suggests, to provide inspiring learning through quality experiences of a museum and gallery education service during a visit from the Magic Bus is one of the most important objectives of the Project. Therefore, the programme deliberately comprises different activities that target a wide range of learning needs and outcomes. It also supports the National Curriculum.

All schools had an assembly at the beginning of the day, performed by a freelance artist. A song on Magic Bus (see Appendix 2) was commissioned in 2006 and was successfully used in following years. The song was written and recorded by Tony Wilson, who also performed several of the assemblies. The assemblies were used to introduce the children to the idea that the sessions were provided by a museum and that the Magic Bus had brought everything that they were going to experience that day.

After an introduction assembly the handling sessions took place in the classroom or school hall. Although this was not as exciting as a visit to a museum it still provided a fun and inspiring experience. For those children who are not used to visiting a museum the school provided them with a safe familiar setting allowing them to engage better with the museum involved. Museum educational professionals from museums across the region delivered a wide variety of 'taster' sessions of their education programmes in schools.

These sessions were all very different and unique to the museum which was being represented. Although each museum involved had sessions based on handling and exploring a variety of real and replica museum objects. Other elements involved role play, drawing and sketching, and literacy. Children were also encouraged to use a variety of skills including speaking and listening, empathy, investigation and enquiry skills.

'All children were completely engrossed during the story assembly. Children certainly enjoyed the classroom activity and seemed pleasantly surprised at what you could find in an art gallery/museum' (Haltwhistle First, 2008).

According to the recommendation from the evaluation of the Pilot the schools involved in the years 2007 and 2008 were given a clear structure and more realistic expectations of what can be accomplished in a day. The taster sessions were chosen by the school from the list of topic options (see Appendix 3). The options were a mixture of popular KS1 and KS2 National Curriculum topics so the visit was suitable for any school studying the National Curriculum. The topics offered were Romans/ Anglo Saxons, Victorians, World War II, Toys and Games, and Art.



Generally, from the information provided in the evaluations it might be summarized schools used their visit from the Magic Bus to compliment teaching, as an introduction to their current or future topic and to consolidate existing learning. Evaluations were very positive. Teachers appreciated the practical nature of the sessions, which many commented kept their pupils enthusiastic and engaged throughout. Teachers were impressed that the taught sessions complimented a wide range of learning styles which allowed different children to flourish.

'One child in particular became more animated and wanted to be involved' (St Mary's Wingate, 2008).

4.2.2 Evaluation process: Using Generic Learning Outcomes Framework as Analysis Framework

In 2006 a sample of pupils' evaluation responses was analysed using Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO) Framework for the first time. Pupil evaluation was completed on the day of the visit at the end of each session. Pupils were given an A5 card printed with the question 'What was your favourite thing about the Magic Bus?' and a large space to record their answers in whichever form they chose. The question was left deliberately open to elicit a wide range of responses. Each card was then analysed for evidence of impact in the 5 GLO categories:



- Knowledge & Understanding
- Skills
- Attitudes and Values
- Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity
- Action, Behaviour & Progression

Consequently the question pupils were asked was strong evidence of impact on **Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity**. Although, some responses revealed an impact in both **Knowledge & Understanding** area and **Skills** area, there was little evidence of an impact on the other two GLO categories. Moreover, it became clear that many of the cards fit into more than one of the categories.

Therefore, in 2007 an evaluation form for teachers was improved to enable them to record observations in terms of project impact on outcomes in areas of Attitudes & Values and Action, Behaviour & Progression.

'The opportunity to watch the pupils interact with an expert was invaluable as an assessment tool – it was instantly obvious who had been following the topic' (Harbottle First, 2008).

The evaluation process in 2007 revealed that the most common category the sample of pupil's evaluation cards demonstrated an impact in was **Knowledge & Understanding**. This supports the observation that pupils particularly benefited from the object focus of the sessions, many of the pupils' cards commented on what they had learnt about the objects they had seen or used. The second most common category was **Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity**. The evaluation cards showed that the pupils enjoyed a wide range of different aspects of the sessions particularly the interactive elements; getting to try new things for themselves, making their own art and role play.



According to the teachers who completed the evaluation in 2007 the most common category in which impact was demonstrated was **Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity**. Several teachers commented that the use of objects in their sessions made *'history come to life'* for their pupils and that it was very satisfying to see them enjoying learning. **Activity, Behaviour & Progression** was the second most common category reported by teachers. The majority of those who respond said that they thought their pupils would be encouraged to learn more,

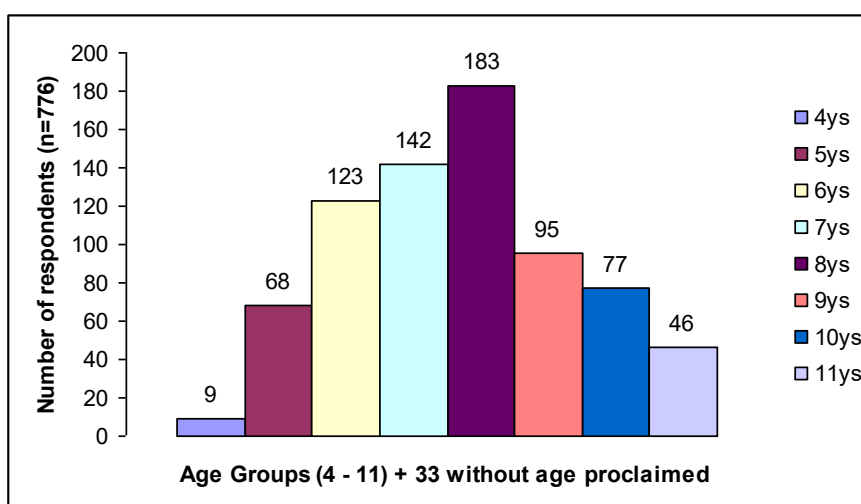
others responded that they hoped their pupils would be encouraged to learn more. Teachers were particularly impressed

by their pupils desire to talk about the session and learn more straight away. The evaluations also showed that teachers believed that Magic Bus visit helped their pupils to develop or practice a range of **skills**. The most commonly sited skills were speaking and listening, questioning and enquiry skills. Several teachers also commented on the development of pupil's levels of empathy.

'The artefacts promoted speaking and listening skills which had specific impact on those children with communication difficulties' (Parkhead Primary, 2007)

In 2008 more than 770 of pupil's evaluation cards were collected. Respondent sample analysis shows that predominantly there were answers from 8 years old participants of the Magic Bus programme (see Chart 5).

Chart 5 Age profile of Magic Bus pupils' evaluation respondents (2008)



According to analysis of the sample of pupils' evaluation cards using GLO Framework it appears that the most common category for which there was an impact was once again **Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity**. Pupils enjoyed a wide range of different aspects of the sessions preferring the interactive elements. The second most common category was **Skills** (see Box 1 for details). The third category that pupils mentioned most frequently was **Knowledge & Understanding**. Many of the pupils' cards commented on what they had learnt about the objects they had explored during sessions. However, the majority of cards fit into more than one of the categories as usual.

Box 1 'What was your favourite thing about the Magic Bus?' – Sample of pupils' comments on evaluation cards ordered by age of respondents (2008)

'Singing, it was so good' (Age: 5)

'Doing the aboriginal art painting with the cotton buds because it was fun' (Age: 6)

'Playing didgeridoo' (Age: 7).

'Making cat mask' Age: 7).

'I enjoyed looking at the interesting artefacts like the piano juke box, the roller skates and all the other brilliant things. I really hope some I will visit your museum. Also I hope I will see you all again too. Magic Bus! Magic Bus!' (Age: 7).

'I liked it when you had to solve the mystery in each suitcase and find out who's it was because I liked holding the objects and how it was like to be a Victorian' (Age: 7).

'My favourite thing was investigating' (Age: 8).

'Learning and writing in the register sheet' (Age: 8).

'I enjoy when I was making my bracelet and my favourite was when I was singing the song and looking at the things what the Saxons had' (Age: 8).

'When we made our own museum' (Age: 8).

'The toys and I learned something new and I enjoyed all of it. Thank you for coming. It was the best work I have learned (Age: 9).

'My favourite thing was the painting of the snake. I really liked the different technique with dots. Also the story was interesting to see two sides of the story' (Age: 10).

'My favourite thing about the Magic Bus, that the idea for the activity was unique. The song we sang in assembly was brilliant, especially when the teachers sang' (Age: 10).

'I like the painting it was fun and also very magical. The story has taught me more. Thank you from T.' (Age: 11).

'My favourite part of Magic Bus was when all dressed up and made a story in the hall. I liked the chimney sweep (Age: 11)

Basically, all teachers' comments (27) analysed in the 2008 evaluation process recognised that Magic Bus programme was very interactive and appealed to all styles of learning (visual, oral and kinaesthetic). When using GLO Framework for analysis it became clear that the most common category in which impact was demonstrated was **Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity**. Both **Knowledge & Understanding** and **Action & Behaviour** were the second most common category in which impact was recognised by teachers. However, teacher observed a lot of evidence for impact in both remaining areas (see Box 2 for examples). For example they felt that the session encouraged their pupils to develop thinking skills such as questioning, reasoning and deduction; observational and recording skills based on investigation of artefacts; personal, social & emotional skills such as listening, speaking, concentrating, co-operation and communicating with adults. Pupils also trained in discussion and used various art techniques

Box 2 Sample of teacher's comments on Magic Bus 2008 programme grouped using GLO Framework

Knowledge & Understanding

'The visit got the children thinking about their historical peers which I didn't think they would have the opportunity to do before' (Swalwell Primary)

'Yes – the children were encouraged to question and explore materials' (Otterburn First).

'Yes. The children could answer many of the questions about how the Victorians lived and talked about materials the objects were made from' (St Joseph's Infants Birtley).

Skills

'Listening skills, observational skills, physical, P.S.E – working together, concentrating' (Teesville Infant)

'Children took time to create an intricate design and used techniques to paint which they wouldn't usually have used' (Links Primary)

Attitudes & Values

'Children... seemed pleasantly surprised at what you could find in an art gallery/museum' (Haltwhistle First).

'The children appreciated the age of some of the artefacts and were very careful with them' (Prudhoe Castle First).

Enjoyment, Inspiration & Creativity

*'Enjoyment evident, work did not encourage creativity' (Swalwell Primary).
'Certainly. The children clearly loved the story assembly and I was pleasantly surprised at the creativity of the children when creating African masks' (Haltwhistle First).*

'Yes – it was a joy to follow it up and refer to it later on in the topic' (Hartbottle First).

Action & Behaviour

*"Children were talked to on their level, they were encourage to express their ideas and given a chance to use their creativity." (Haltwhistle First, 2008)
"Children were interested to feel the African masks and asked questions." (Haltwhistle First, 2008)*

"They became even more enthusiastic about the topic." (Harbottle First)

4.3 Promoting Benefits of Object Based Learning

'I hope I will visit your museum soon I loved looking at the artefacts' (Pupil's comment, 2008)

Although each museum involved in Magic Bus project has a different programme and range of collections all of the sessions were based on handling and exploring a variety of real and replica museum objects. This deliberate decision was underpinned by their confidence and their ability of handling sessions to engage and motivate pupils. Moreover, such sessions are a fantastic way to demonstrate to schools the benefits of museum visits and object based learning.

'The involvement of staff from Beamish was a good tool for engaging the children, as was the use of artefacts' (Witton-le-Wear Primary).

Indeed, Durbin, Morris and Wilkinson show in *Learning from Objects* (1990) that there are many educational reasons for using museum artefacts. They emphasise the key issue of motivation promoting that:

'Objects have a remarkable capacity to motivate. They develop the "need to know" which will first spark children's interest, then their curiosity or creativity, and then stimulate their research. Handling objects is a form of active learning that engages children in way that other methods often fail to

do. Objects provide a concrete experience that aids or illuminates abstracts thought' (Durbin, Morris and Wilkinson 1990: 4).

'My favourite thing is looking at the objects. The spiky one tickled my fingers and I loved the gold one. I really enjoyed it' (Pupil's comment, 2008)

Moreover, according to Shuh (1996: 85) using objects helps pupils develop important intellectual skills, particularly the capacity for critical observation. Durbin, Morris and Wilkinson identify more than twenty other skills such as deducing, classifying or recording through writing (1990: 5). They also show the possibility for extending knowledge and developing concepts by using object based learning.

According to the results of the Magic Bus evaluation, teachers recognise and appreciate such benefits of object based learning (see Box 3). However, due to capacity of the Magic Bus team it was not always possible to provide 'taster' sessions for all pupils in school. Therefore, in 2007 and 2008 classes that did not get to participate in a taught session were offered loans boxes. These boxes contained objects linked to a variety of National Curriculum topics. Classes were welcomed to borrow them during a visit from the Magic Bus.

Box 3 Sample of teachers' comments on benefits of object based learning

'There was a buzz of excitement when it became time to handle the objects.'

'Handling and recording the objects increased observation and recording skills.'

'Increased observation skills, introduction to topic – to be followed up as history/ technology'

'Hands on exploration/ investigation of artefacts'

(Swalwell Primary, 2008)

4.4 Informal Learning: Focus on Families

'The more often people are brought to museums as children, the more likely they are to be frequent visitors as adults.'
(Borun, Cleghorn and Garfield 1995: 263)

Families are widely recognized as one of the largest and most important group of museum visitors. On one hand, it seems to be a permanent feature of family visitors that adults are motivated to bring children to museums if they realise the educational potential of the visit (Hawke 2008). On the other, families prefer non-school-looking activities and so-called informal learning (Beaumont and Sterry 2006).

By Wood informal learning has 'no predefined objectives or strategies or curriculum determined outcomes. It is a free-choice, unstructured, casual activity' (Wood 1996:80). Moreover, museum visitors might be stimulated by exhibits to learn more about themselves and their experiences rather than about displayed facts and illustrated topics (Paris 2000). And because emotional, personal and aesthetic reactions are almost permanently 'overshadowed by cognitive acquisition in formal learning contexts' (Paris 2000:202), it is very important to support these neglected aspects of learning at least in informal settings.



Although the Magic Bus project was predominantly targeted on formal settings, the bus was used to promote museum and galleries educational service for families, too. In 2006 on weekends the bus travelled around the region to museums, Sure Start Centres and town centres to promote family learning opportunities.

In 2007 in co-operation with the Hub Education Teams' Family Learning Officer it was decided not to run the project on a weekend but to offer Sure Start Centres, Family Centres and Nurseries the opportunity to book a visit from the Magic Bus during February half term. These visits were structured informal sessions with the emphasis being that museums are fun and exciting places for families to visit. Children and adults could examine objects, take part in craft sessions, try on a variety of costumes and listen to a story-teller, sing the Magic Bus song and have their face painted. Museum leaflets and information were available for the parents and workers and all the children received Magic Bus goody bags.

'There were things for all ages to do and lots of ideas about days out to museums. More please....' (Parent, 2007)

The evaluation from these sessions showed that the families taking part found them very enjoyable and worthwhile. Therefore, in 2008 the sessions were similar. However, local libraries were sent invitation to take part in the project as well and Magic Bus visited six of them during February half term.



5. Future of the Magic Bus: Recommendations

Since 2006 when the Magic Bus first visited dozens of schools in the North East to raise awareness of the wide ranging opportunities to engage with museum education services in the region the context change. This report showed to what extent the Magic Bus project has contributed to increasing number and quality level of engagements of schools and museums in the North East Region.

Moreover, the Magic Bus has developed strong brand identity, particularly among primary schools in the region. This report has presented a particular number of evidence that brand loyalty and awareness based on association of the Magic Bus with quality experience of museum and gallery education exists.

'The Magic Bus came to school so ALL pupils accessed the resource, especially as a whole school assembly 'sparked' the children's' imagination' (Prudhoe Castle First).

Although it might be assumed that the Project has reached its aim, there are still possibilities it can be improved and developed further.

5.1 Improvement of the Project: Recommendations from 2007 and 2008 Evaluation

In spite of the fact that the Project was improved every year following the recommendations arising from the evaluation process, there are still two main recommendations left from 2007:

- Investigate possibility of offering the Magic Bus to Secondary Schools – Secondary Schools are quite a large proportion of the low or non participating schools. The Hub need to consult with schools and museums to see if this is viable.
- Make improvements to the loans boxes that are offered to schools during a visit from the Magic Bus – The loans boxes may include simple teacher notes and some suggestions for easy activities that can be used without needing any prior knowledge.

According to evaluation of the Magic Bus 2008 a clear communication with schools seems to be very important issue. Therefore, it is recommended to:

- Provide clearer information to the person co-ordinating the visit in school and get them to sign to say that they understand and will abide by the most important conditions. It will also be necessary to be clearer what the responsibilities of the person coordinating the project in school are.



5. 2 Development of the Project: Recommendations from Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey

In June 2008 both groups of main stakeholders of the Magic Bus project - schools and museums in the North East – were asked to write down their recommendations on development of the Magic Bus. They were asked to comment on a set of possible options, to state their preferred option and express their own ideas, too (see Appendix 4). The analysis is based on 10 responses from museum sector (representing 14 venues) and 17 responses from primary schools involved in the project in 2007 and 2008 (see Appendix 5 for detail answers).

5.2.1 Option 1: Magic Bus would be run every two years and continue to bring museum resources in school

According to the respondents from the museum sector this possibility of development of the Project is not appropriate due to the lack of continuity. On the other hand, this option is the most preferable for schools as they appreciate the idea that Magic Bus will deliver quality education for them every other year. As a result of schools not being aware of the one-for-ever targeting of the Project on those identified as not or low participatory, they may easily expect repeat visits from the Magic Bus.

This would be the preferred option for our school as we would value any input from the museum service into school (Eslington, Magic Bus 2008).

Museum resources into school are a super way of enriching the curriculum alongside educational visits to museums where a different set of skills can be developed (Parkhead Primary, Magic Bus 2007).

This would continue to be very useful (Witton-le-Wear Primary, Magic Bus 2008).

Best option so as to give experience to children/schools unable to fund trip to museum (St Pius X Consett, Magic Bus 2007).

5.2.2 Option 2: Magic Bus activities would not continue, however tailored sessions linking schools to their closest museum/gallery, would be available at least once a year

This option seems to be very ambivalent. An equal number of museums as well as schools prefer this option, an equal number of them reject it. The reasons vary. The idea that the brand and service would not continue is not popular. For those who had developed close institutional relationship this solution is not beneficial. On the other hand, two-way visits are appreciated as a good starting point for co-operation.

A good idea because it allows pupils to be in a real museum and encourages further visits with families (Otterburn First, Magic Bus 2008).

5.2.3 Option 3: Magic Bus activities would not continue, however special training for teachers working with museums and galleries will be available on a regular basis

Great idea! I have resources here in the museum that I have developed to encourage teachers to do self-led museum visits. No teachers want to use them though!! With some support to show teachers what is available to them before they visit the museum, and how resources can be used, I feel teachers will be enthused and more willing to give us a visit (Captain Cook Birthplace Museum).

Although the half of museum respondents prefers this option and half is rather sceptic about its success, teachers do not prefer it at all.

*This would take some of the fun of a museum visit away (Parkhead Primary, Magic Bus 2007).
Specialists from the museums and galleries know their collections well and are better placed to deliver high quality workshops (with the support of teachers) (Hamsterley Primary, Magic Bus 2008).*

5.2.4 Option 4: Magic Bus becomes a special transport service for schools from rural and isolated areas to help them to engage with museums and galleries more often (partially funded by school)

In general all respondents prefer the option that Magic Bus becomes a special transport service for schools from rural and isolated areas to help them to engage with museums and galleries more often. However, they recommend to extend this option in terms of inclusion of schools from socially deprived areas and subsidising transport for urban schools to rural sites as well.

By far the best idea, however good an outreach session nothing beats getting out of the classroom and actually visiting museums and galleries to see what they offer – I'm sure this would be the teacher's preferred choice as well (Bede's World).

This would be excellent for small rural schools because: 1) cost of transport to cities and museums is considerable, 2) experiencing a museum 'in situ' is, overall, a better experience than the museum coming to school (Otterburn First, Magic Bus 2008).

5.2.5 Option 5: Magic Bus might ...

Ideas provided by schools seem to cover wide range of needs and expectations of individual schools. From one school point of view Magic Bus might be developed in even more frequent services related to schools long term planning. On the other hand, two other schools would have appreciated if the Magic Bus had been able to leave the loan boxes in school for half term.

Ideally it would be really beneficial for pupils to have at least one visit/ visitor to /from galleries and museums each term – this could really make a difference in enhancing the curriculum (Hamsterley Primary, Magic Bus 2008).

Ideas provided by museums may be summarise recommendations for the development of the Magic Bus. If the outreach sessions are run every other year and then the teacher training or tailored sessions in venues are provided, it will establish a system of two-way co-operation and provide funds for subsidised visits of schools in need.

We would be happy to go into schools promoting the service, perhaps doing a taster session and trying to get them to sign up for a return subsidised visit using the Magic Bus (Dorman Museum).

By continuing the Magic Bus sessions for children this may also be welcomed by teachers due to the 'Find Your Talent' programme (Arbeia & South Shields Museum).



6. List of references

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Successful Engagement
(33 – 34)

Appendix 2 The Magic Bus Song (by Tony Wilson) (35)

Appendix 3 Topic Options (36)

Appendix 4 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Questions (37 – 38)

Appendix 5 Magic Bus Final Evaluation Survey: Recommendations (39 – 44)