

NMA Review Secretariat

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Submission to National Museum of Australia Review

From the Institute of Museum and Gallery Education (IMAGE)

IMAGE is the education Special Interest Group of Museums Australia (MA). The group provides a professional network for members working in education, public programs and allied museum fields in the Canberra region.

Museum Education

Museum education aims to interpret collections imaginatively to all levels of interest and provide the fullest range of learning opportunities, addressing contemporary and historical issues, meeting the needs of school curriculum and providing life-long learning opportunities.

Education at the National Museum of Australia (NMA)

The Schools Program of the NMA plays a key role in program development, delivery and evaluation. It provides new opportunities for creating innovative and relevant education programs that expands the visitor experiences and increases diversity of audiences. The programs offered are exciting, engaging, diverse and curriculum-relevant for students of all ages.

School groups visiting cultural institutions are a unique audience. General characteristics are:

- a captive audience travelling in large numbers
- a busy itinerary visiting many places in a short time
- itinerary is pre-paid and generally on a low budget
- schedule is often inflexible
- wanting to meet a mix of educational and social needs.

This presents challenges and opportunities for any cultural institution.

The NMA has responded to this market by providing a range of programs and experiences. A general introduction and self guide through exhibitions and gallery spaces is essential to process large numbers of students, and many other institutions in Canberra employ a similar model. In most cases these are provided free of charge. Importantly the NMA has developed excellent self-guide highlight tours for these students and teachers to improve their experience.

However in today's competitive climate this form of self-guide is not enough on its own. Teachers and parents are increasingly demanding greater educational value in out-of-school programs. There is recognition of the value of teaching students the importance of Australian history and providing an educationally engaging experience. In recognition of this the NMA provides a series of teacher facilitated programs linked to school curriculum and exhibitions. Programs such as *Springboard* and *Race Around the Museum* meet the needs of school age visitors extremely well.

These imaginative programs are engaging and educational for students, incorporating techniques and technologies that are pedagogically sound. The programs have won high praise from students, teachers and museum education peers. Importantly these programs offer teachers and tour organisers choices of learning level, time length and price that are essential to meet client needs. Of note are the extensive range of infants and lower primary programs offered by the NMA.

As both self-guide and facilitated programs are based firmly in the Museum's goals, collections and exhibitions, they raise the awareness of students' knowledge of Australian history and are very effective in value-adding to the general museum experience. School groups engaging with a variety of objects, artefacts and primary sources become more aware of the role of history, and revisit and strengthen their concepts of history and Australian identity.

Museum education staff have skills in developing conceptual and thematic approaches to learning for young people that are often not held by other staff. The Schools Program staff at the NMA are no exception, and their programs combine a sound pedagogical basis with fresh, innovative learning techniques.

The value of the NMA's education programs extends to the teaching resources, outreach programs and initiatives such as *Talkback Classroom*. The education section has made a significant contribution to professional conferences and forums,

teaching fellowships and other external initiatives such as the National Capital Educational Tourism Project. Education staff have contributed to gallery development, website content and public programs.

I hope that the current review will recognise the very valuable contribution that the NMA Schools Program is making to the education of young Australians. On behalf of IMAGE I recommend that the NMA be encouraged and funded to extend that contribution.

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and
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