

1 Sponsored Museums: Method Change

There have been changes and improvements in the methodology for visitor research at the consortium of sponsored museums and galleries since 2008-09; changes which preclude a direct like-for-like comparison of the results from 2008-09 with those from 2013-14. As a result, it is not possible to make a definitive assertion on trends in overseas nor UK visit numbers between 2008-09 and 2013-14.

The changes in methodology, implemented from October 2010 onwards, and covering the first full financial year in 2011-12 are described briefly below.

Foreign Language Translations

In 2008-09, surveys at the sponsored museums and galleries were only undertaken in English – excluding foreign language visitors (a major audience cohort) from the survey and the data – in essence **UK visitors were therefore ‘over-represented’ in the data.**

From October 2010 onwards, visitors could complete the survey in English or one of eight other languages including: French; German; Spanish; Italian; Polish; Japanese; Korean and Chinese.

This change in method had a direct and significant impact on the proportion of overseas visits recorded at sponsored museums and galleries

For example, in 2013-14, the proportion of overseas visits at one of the sponsored museums if only English language surveys were included in the analysis was 47% with UK at 53%.

Including foreign language surveys in the analysis resulted in an increase in the proportion of overseas visits from 47% to 60% and therefore an associated decrease in UK visits from 53% to 40%.

Move from wave to rolling research

Between 2008-09 and 2010-11, visitor research at some venues was conducted in waves: typically Summer; Winter and Spring. Sampling periods typically covered 2-3 week periods in June/July, October/November and March.

This data provided a snapshot of the audience in these periods but did not provide any data on audiences visiting in April, May, August, September, December, January or February.

Surveys were therefore conducted for 2-3 weeks in the first two quarters of the year – peak visit periods for overseas visits to London. As a result, the **proportion of UK visits is likely to have been over-estimated** in the overall annual data.

From October 2010 onwards, a rolling research method was adopted, with interviews conducted in 2011-12 for example, every week from April 2011 to March 2012. Interviews were conducted at weekdays and weekends, covering public holidays, school holidays and non-holiday periods, according to a sample frame which ensured the interviews were gathered according to the visit flow at the venues. The result being improved, more representative, visit data.

The introduction of foreign languages was a change in methodology for all sponsored museums in the consortium. The change from wave to rolling research was only implemented at some of the venues. Existing MHM clients such as British Museum, Imperial War Museums and National Portrait Gallery already had this rolling research in place from 2008-09 onwards.

The list below shows sponsored museums where data for overseas (and therefore UK) visits would have been affected by the introduction of foreign languages in October 2010, and also, in some instances, a change in the sampling approach from wave to rolling.

1. British Museum
2. IWM London
3. Churchill War Rooms
4. HMS Belfast
5. IWM Duxford
6. IWM North
7. National Gallery
8. National Portrait Gallery
9. Natural History Museum
10. Tate Modern
11. Tate Britain
12. V&A
13. Museum of Childhood