

**MINISTRY FOR CULTURE AND
HERITAGE REPORT OF SPECIFIC
ISSUES RELATING TO THE MUSEUM
OF NEW ZEALAND TE PAPA
TONGAREWA**

Conducted by

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Mr Martin Matthews
Acting Chief Executive
Ministry for Culture and Heritage
PO Box 5364
Wellington, New Zealand

Dear Mr Matthews

Re: Report of Specific Issues relating to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

We are pleased to convey to you this report of our findings from a review of specific issues concerning the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, which is presented as Te Papa.

In setting out the terms of reference for this review you reminded us that the Museum had received a substantial number of visitors during its first two years since opening, and that it had received a very positive response from the majority of those visitors. You also noted that Te Papa had received criticism in several important areas.

You asked us to consider these specific issues: the extent to which Te Papa had achieved its founding Concept, in the terms approved by Government in 1992; the effectiveness of its presentation of “the National Art Collection”; the level of commitment it has shown toward scholarship and research; and any other matters concerning its exhibitions which relate to the presentation of a national museum.

In general terms we were impressed with the achievements of Te Papa. In the majority of instances, the Te Papa Board, senior management and staff have carefully assessed the important issues to emerge from both the positive and negative commentary that it has received over the past two years.

In many instances, the Museum has either developed plans to address those issues or taken remedial action as and where appropriate. Some of the criticisms levelled at Te Papa are in

fact taken into account through the Museum's own internal review processes, such as its substantial commitment to visitor research.

There are, however, important issues that have emerged in consideration of the criticisms made of Te Papa, and the Museum's response to them, and we therefore recommend that they further consider, with a view to implementation, the proposals that we have made in this review.

We commend this report to you and would be happy to discuss any matter arising from it further.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Des Griffin, AM, Convenor
Gerard Krefft Memorial Fellow, Australian Museum, Sydney

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TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW

The Te Papa Review Team's terms of reference were established by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, as follows:

1. Establish whether the conceptual framework that was approved by Cabinet in 1992 has been effected;
2. Assess whether the national art collection is being presented to the public in the most effective way;
3. Examine whether the national museum has upheld scholarship and research values; and
4. Advise whether there are other issues arising from Te Papa's exhibitions that should be considered in relation to the presentation of a national museum.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa was formed from the resources of the former National Museum and National Art Gallery. In the two years since its opening, on 14 February 1998, the Museum has recorded some 3.5 million visits, with 93% of visitors surveyed rating their visiting experience as “good to excellent”. Such a demonstrably high level of visitor patronage and support is a clear indication of the Museum’s success, placing in no doubt the achievement of its stated objectives to create a new museum audience and to further the cultural interests and aspirations of the people of New Zealand. Yet despite this evident success, at one level, the Museum has also been the focus for much debate and some criticism at another, particularly around its approach to the display and the interpretation of the visual arts.

As a response to this continuing debate, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage commissioned a review to consider a number of the specific issues that continued to be raised about the Museum. These included: 1, the extent to which it had realised its 1992 founding Concept; 2, the effectiveness of its presentation of the National Art Collection; 3, its level of commitment to scholarship and research values; and 4, any other issues concerning its exhibitions which are relevant to the presentation of a national museum. In undertaking its review, the Review Team was asked to consider these four terms of reference in the context of the critical commentary summarised in the commissioning documentation.

When established in 1992 through the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act, the Board of Te Papa accepted a number of specific and demanding concepts, principles and objectives against which it has continued to report and be measured by Government. The framework on which the Museum is based comprises three concepts: “Papatuanuku, the earth on which we all live; Tangata Whenua, those who belong to the land by right of first discovery; and Tangata Tiriti, those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty”. The Museum’s objectives included acknowledging and reflecting the diversity of New Zealand’s peoples; housing and presenting its national treasures and collections as unified collections, and being committed to excellence in all that it does.

In addition, the corporate principles underpinning the Museum’s operations required that it should at all times be: bicultural, customer focused and speak with the authority derived from scholarship and Maturanga Maori. It was also required to be commercially positive and a Waharoa - both an entryway and a catalyst for New Zealanders to explore and reflect on their cultural identity and natural heritage through stories and objects. As originally conceived, Te Papa was to be concerned with the natural environment, Maori life and culture, art, history (including prehistory) and the delivery of a national service. Through this

latter service, the Museum was also to acknowledge the value of regionally held collections and work to establish partnerships with other museums and galleries.

From the outset the Museum accepted the challenge to create a new audience for museums in New Zealand. It undertook extensive audience research and considered developments in other museums around the world as part of its quality improvement and benchmarking practices. This process continues to this day, meaning that the qualitative and quantitative data gathered by the Museum is extensive. The need to be commercially positive, for example, is supported by the inclusion of themed attractions of a highly experiential nature. Development of many of the aspects of the Museum, specifically the exhibitions and its approach to scholarship and Mātauranga Māori, were also extensively reviewed by a panel of New Zealand and international experts.

Exhibition presentation strategies were subsequently put in place that focused strongly on the quality of the visitor experience. These included the deployment of a large number of “Hosts”, staff who worked on the floor meeting and greeting visitors and assisting them in the information, display and interpretation spaces of the Museum. Wearing informal clothing featuring the Te Papa logo, rather than forbidding uniforms, they became part of an experience and interpretation strategy that sought to privilege the general visitor rather than the expert. Resource Centres attached to major gallery spaces also formed an integral part of this concept, housing objects and support materials including Te Papa OnScreen, a developing data base on the collections.

In addressing its terms of reference, the Review Team interviewed members of the Board, senior management and staff of the Museum. It also sought out and interviewed either in person or by telephone a range of people from the academic, research and art communities. These interviews assisted the Review Team to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of the criticisms levelled at Te Papa and to arrive at its own conclusions in response to them. The purpose throughout was to assist Te Papa in both maintaining its wide audience base and, at the same time, to seek to address the legitimate concerns and wants of those whose specialist knowledge and understanding comes from their position in fields of expertise relevant to the Museum’s activity.

The Review Team concludes that Te Papa has largely worked within and successfully realised the conceptual framework that was adopted by Government in May 1992. The Team also acknowledges the importance of the Museum having largely sustained that framework in a consistent way, given its available resources and its breadth of potential interpretation. Nonetheless there are areas where the Museum should consider how to better articulate aspects of its founding Concept Statement. Were it to do so the Review Team believes that it would significantly assist it to better “understand and treasure the past, enrich the present and meet the challenges of the future”, a founding purpose which remains central to its current Statement of Intent.

The Review Team was impressed by the extensive consultation with iwi that takes place in the development of all exhibitions concerning Maori people and their history and culture. As one of the guiding principles applied in exhibition development, the Museum takes a strongly bicultural approach to all of its activity.¹ The acceptance of bicultural principles and of the parallel validity of western scholarship and Mātauranga Māori gives iwi a significant say in the way their culture and history is presented. Biculturalism is recognised in the Museum's organisational structure at the highest level and in the protocols for many of its activities, including ceremonies associated with all exhibition openings.

The Review Team also notes and commends the work of the Museum in audience evaluation and knowledge of learning theory and practice, recognising the highly developed knowledge of museum audiences that it has acquired. The knowledge of the potential and actual audience for Te Papa held by the staff responsible for these areas is substantial and compares more than favourably with the very best of museum practice worldwide. The relevance of this knowledge and its application in marketing, visitor relations and exhibition interpretation is similarly very commendable, as is the way in which audience evaluation information has been used in education programmes.

The Review Team concludes that the concept of integrated collections, forming an interpretive core throughout the Te Papa experience, is as sound as it is challenging. Significant thought and consideration has also gone into the selection and interpretation of much of the art presentation within the Museum, as it has in the analysis of audience expectation of and response to that presentation. The Review Team also considers Te Papa OnScreen to be a significant and developing resource, but considers that its placement and perceived accessibility merits review. The style and content of labels, interpretive media (including audio-visual presentations) and visual art publishing are a further focus of concern. Te Papa has a comprehensive publishing policy that it is intending to review.

So far as art exhibitions (in the European tradition) are concerned, the Review Team was aware of the criticism of the major exhibition *Parade*. The Review Team notes that there is substantial awareness at Board level and amongst senior management of the challenges and the difficulties posed by its approach to art presentation and interpretation. It further notes that a visual arts display strategy was formulated at Board level in October 1999 to address these issues. The strategy considered the spaces currently allocated to art, their conceptual and physical connections, and other design and architectural issues. The Review Team acknowledges that temporary exhibitions, giving greater exposure to the art collection over time, will continue as part of the strategy's implementation.

¹ The Review Team does not include a Maori person and this Report does not seek to speak for Maori people.

So far as scholarship and research values are concerned the Review Team is satisfied that there is a clear set of policies, projects developed from them and criteria for assessment of projects. Research and scholarship are pursued in accordance with strategies developed from the major policy statement on this area, "Speaking with Authority". In turn, outputs from core projects address specific audiences, with those staff responsible for achievement of the projects being identified and dates for completion specified.

Scholarship contributes to many areas of the Museum's endeavours including contracts with other government agencies, exhibitions, and in consideration of acquisitions and matters pertaining to the return of taonga to iwi. The Review Team found considerable evidence of the application of "twin streams of knowledge" in exhibitions, although some debate exists about the extent to which this is applied across all exhibitions. Collection management systems and the protocols surrounding provision of access to the collections appropriately recognise the demands placed on the Museum as a loan resource. The Review Team also notes that accommodation outside the main Cable Street building for collections has been obtained and appropriately refurbished to a standard substantially better than anything in the history of the Museum.

Given the challenging concepts, principles and objectives accepted by the Board of Te Papa, and the different approaches adopted to achieve the mandate to increase and broaden the museum audience, it is not surprising that the Museum has received some criticism. Some of that criticism, particularly that which concerns art spaces and the presentation of art, has been addressed by the Board and appropriate remedial strategies adopted. This has been assisted by the Museum's extensive knowledge of its audience, - its demographic and psychographic profile - as well as through evaluation and testing of the visitor's reaction to exhibitions and the visiting experience. The broadest and one of the most important recommendations of the review is that the Museum's stated intention to undertake specific evaluations of visitor response to its major exhibitions should be undertaken as soon as possible.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Term of Reference 1: The Concept

Recommendation 1

That Te Papa pursues its intention to re-evaluate the key design and architectural elements of *Parade*.

Recommendation 2

That Te Papa should continue to pursue the notion of unified collections as axiomatic to its Concept but in its implementation the Museum should, at all times, aim to respect and acknowledge the integrity of all individual collections and collection objects. In particular, it should be recognised that works of art have particular meanings and contexts of production, which remain unique to them, notwithstanding that these same works of art might usefully contribute to a wider understanding of other independent narratives within the Museum context.

Recommendation 3

That Te Papa continues to examine ways in which it can re-interpret the story of convergence between the land and the peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. This story can only serve to further build on the goal to “encourage understanding of our natural and social environments”.

Term of Reference 2: The National Art Collection

Recommendation 4

That the planned evaluations of the visitor experience within the major exhibition spaces, especially *Parade*, be undertaken by the Museum as soon as possible. The evaluations should be both quantitative and qualitative and include summative evaluation of interpretive strategies, narratives, and presentation methods and design approaches. They should focus on, among other things, linkages between existing layers of visitor experience, collection materials and information sources. The results of those evaluations should be effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders and, through the media, to the Museum’s audience generally so as to extend understanding of the Museum and its activity.

Recommendation 5

That the Museum’s plan to review, increase and potentially reallocate spaces significantly featuring works of art, as well as redesign and reconfigure those spaces, be implemented as a matter of urgency. And, that appropriate consideration be given to the provision of a

central art exhibition space, with adjacencies between galleries, showing art in a wider discipline-specific context.

Recommendation 6

That a review of the labelling, interpretive media and publishing related to the art collection be conducted, and that standards be developed for the Museum's interpretive programmes which meet the needs of both the populist/generalist audience and a committed art-interested audience.

Recommendation 7

That the resources available for scholarly activity associated with the art collection be increased.

Recommendation 8

That further consideration be given to the use of audio visual/audio devices in exhibitions to minimise unnecessary intrusiveness.

Term of Reference 3: Scholarship and Research Values

Recommendation 9

That the planned exhibition proposal (currently listed within the Museum's core projects), concerning navigation and the peopling of the Pacific, one of the central issues concerning the history of New Zealand and its peoples, proceed.

INTRODUCTION

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa developed as a concept through the 1980's. It gained the support of governments from 1989 on, with specific agreements being reached in 1990 and 1992, as a development that disestablished the former National Museum and National Art Gallery. The collections and staff of those two institutions, then housed in buildings on Buckle Street, were to be transferred and assimilated into the new organisation. In May 1985 Government endorsed the proposition that the new Museum be sited on the Wellington waterfront and at the same time it rescinded its then current decision to build a new National Art Gallery in Molesworth Street.

In 1985 a major report from a committee chaired by Mr Mel Smith was presented to the Hon Peter Tapsell, Minister for the Arts. The report responded to a brief to develop a clear and specific definition of a "Pacific Cultural Centre that would include the National Art Gallery and relevant aspects of the National Museum". Supporting a full and equal partnership between the two main cultures of New Zealand, the report recognised the concept it developed as an expression of the bicultural nature of New Zealand. It concluded that an appropriate description of the concept as a whole was the "National Museum of New Zealand/Te Marae Taonga o Aotearoa". Cabinet agreed with the proposal for a single Museum of New Zealand in 1987.

The Government subsequently commissioned a Project Development Board who adopted a modified proposal for the Museum in April 1989, now titled the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and extended this proposal in December 1991. The Museum was to honour the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. The proposal had as its principles and goals a number of cultural aspirations. In part, these included furthering the cultural interests and aspirations of all the people of New Zealand, housing and presenting its national treasures and collections in a unified way and seeking excellence in all that it does.

Cabinet formally endorsed the proposal for the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 1990 and again in 1992. Appropriate legislation was adopted and a Board appointed in 1992 which proceeded to approve an appropriate Corporate Plan and organisational structure (which, in particular, moved away from the more traditional functional structure of art, history, natural history and so on). The Corporate principles that were developed to underpin operations mandated the Museum to be bicultural; to be customer focused, and to speak with the authority which derived from scholarship and Mātauranga Māori. The new Museum was to be commercially positive and to be a Waharoa - both an entryway and a catalyst - for New Zealanders to explore and reflect on their cultural identity and natural heritage through stories and objects. Furthermore, the Board accepted the challenge to create a new audience for museums.

Major exhibition plans were developed and considered in 1994 by a Peer Review Team which included international and New Zealand experts.²: They gave “overwhelming positive and enthusiastic support to the concepts”. International and national consideration was also given to the development of scholarship and research. Other appropriate and necessary policies and plans were developed and considered by the Board and extensive visitor research conducted. A new waterfront building was designed and built and fitted out by 1997 and a number of “soft openings” were held which allowed assessment of the visitor reaction and correction of important problems.

Te Papa opened on 14 February 1998 and over the next two years the Museum recorded some 3.5 million people; with 93% of the visitors surveyed rating the visiting experience as “good to excellent”. The very positive public response to Te Papa provides a genuine and high level indication of the success of the project. In those terms alone Te Papa has already achieved its core goals to create a new museum audience and to further the cultural interests and aspirations of the people of New Zealand.

At the same time Te Papa has also been the focus for much debate, particularly around its approach to the display and interpretation of the visual arts. With the change of Government in 1999 the new Prime Minister sought independent advice on the approach and operations of Te Papa and the decision was made by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage to commission a review of the Museum to consider a number of specific issues.

² Dr T L Rodney Wilson was a member of this Team.

METHODOLOGY

The Review Team consulted each of the key Museum and Ministry of Cultural Affairs reports and Cabinet minutes relating to the development and subsequent adoption by Government of the 1992 Concept Statement.

A substantial folio of media reporting on the Museum and its activities and programmes, mainly since 1998, was made available by the Museum.

The Review Team also reviewed substantial documentation supplied by the Museum including numerous audience surveys, both quantitative and qualitative, conducted from 1994 to the present, and including in-depth research data on visitor's expectations of how the art collection should be presented. (The documents consulted are listed in Appendix 1.)

The Review Team participated in presentations and discussions with Museum staff and external experts including academics, artists and critics. (These are listed in Appendix 2.) The external experts were chosen from the Review Team's knowledge of known experts (including those in universities and government agencies) and lists of relevant people submitted by the Museum itself.

The interviews and discussions included the following:

- Introduction to Te Papa's facilities and major exhibitions by the CEO, senior management and relevant specialist staff.
- Presentations by Te Papa Board members, the CEO, senior management and relevant specialist staff.
- Interviews with Museum staff conducted collectively and individually, variously with the support and participation of the CEO and senior management. (Ms Pat Stuart, General Manager Strategic Planning, was present at all interviews with staff.)
- Interviews with expert curators, artists, scholars and specialists associated with the disciplines represented within the Museum.

The Review Team examined the Museum's exhibitions as a group and individually to assess modes of presentation, interpretative strategies and the level of scholarship within the exhibitions. In so doing, the Review Team sought to assess the extent to which a visitor could access Te Papa's knowledge and object information as well as make connections with other relevant information (for instance via the Museum's Information Technology

resources). These were then assessed, where appropriate, against the practices of other major world museums.

The Review Team also toured, under the guidance of senior management and staff, the Museum's exhibitions and the research laboratories and collection storage areas recently moved to renovated buildings in Tory Street.

TERM OF REFERENCE 1: THE CONCEPT FRAMEWORK

Statement of Term of Reference

The first term of reference required the Review Team to “establish whether the conceptual framework that was approved by Cabinet in 1992 has been effected”.

Background to the Concept Statement

The concept that has guided the development of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa since its inception was first comprehensively expressed in the report, “A Concept for the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa”. Prepared by the Museum, in consultation with a group of 20 key opinion leaders from New Zealand and Australia, the Museum’s Development Board adopted the report at a meeting held on 4 April 1989.

The Concept Statement was subsequently presented to Cabinet’s Policy Committee on the recommendation of the Minister of Internal Affairs in a report of 29 January 1990, and was noted in the minutes of the Committee’s meeting on 31 January 1990. In May 1991 Cabinet received a report on the development of the Museum project from the Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Cultural Affairs.

The Minister of Cultural Affairs subsequently prepared a report to Cabinet in March 1992 that argued that there was “widespread support for the fundamental tenets of the Museum of New Zealand concept”. The report also noted that less support existed for the proposed operational structure, then including Departments of the Natural Environment, Maori Art and History, Art, History, and National Services, and that these would be subject to later review. Cabinet received and adopted this report in May 1992 with the Concept subsequently being integrated into and legislatively endorsed through the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992.

The Concept Statement

The following Statement of Purpose headed the 1992 Concept Statement:

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa provides a forum for the nation to present, explore, and preserve the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order better to understand and treasure the past, enrich the present and meet the challenges of the future.

The Preamble to the Statement elaborates some of the key elements underpinning the aspirations for the new museum, including that it “will be a national museum that powerfully expresses the total culture of New Zealand.” Further, “It will express the bicultural nature of the country, recognising the mana and significance of each of the two mainstreams of tradition and cultural heritage and providing the means for each to contribute effectively to a statement of the nation’s identity. The Museum through all its activities and programmes will strive to be a source of pride for all New Zealanders.”

The Preamble emphasised the importance of the new museum’s inheritance, “the extensive and valued collections at present under the care of the National Art Gallery and National Museum [that] will form the basis of the collections of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.” It continued, “The Museum will be a new institution providing an exciting opportunity to bring New Zealanders a vision of themselves embracing the past and the present and drawing on the total resources of the Museum.” Underscoring the Preamble was the commitment that, in all that it does, the Museum “will honour the principles of Te Tiriti-o-Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi”.

The Concept outlines the Principles and Goals to which the Museum should adhere. This included its commitment to furthering “the cultural interests and aspirations of all the people of New Zealand”; “acknowledg[ing] and reflect[ing] the diversity of New Zealand’s peoples”; and “offer[ing] an enjoyable and enriching range of displays and activities that will encourage understanding”. These would emerge from its role as a caring repository, committed to excellence in all that it does, and working under the guidance of a single Board through which the unity of the Concept could be consistently expressed and implemented.

Critical to this was the unified manner in which the collections were to be drawn on and presented, such that they could offer “varied views of and insights into the richness of our cultural heritage.” Collection based activity was, as has been noted, to be conducted within separate departments in a traditional functional organisational structure.

Other Principles and Goals described the Museum’s national functions, including that it “will acknowledge the value of regionally-held objects and collections within the broad concept of collections of national importance.” This function was to be further served through the development of a Department of National Services designed to provide a range of training, conservation, exhibition and advisory services, including collection inventories, and a loans and touring exhibition programme.

Section III of the Statement, the Framework, provided the conceptual structure for the Museum that would guide all matters of concern to it, as follows:

Papatuanuku

The earth on which we all live. The earth, the sea, the flora and fauna and the environment of Aotearoa – New Zealand, the Pacific and the wider world.

Tangata Whenua

Those who belong to the land by right of first discovery. The cultural identity of the Maori people of Aotearoa, including art, heritage, history, language, marae skills, science, society, technology and relationship with the land, and their place in the Pacific and the wider world.

Tangata Tiriti

Those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty. The cultural identity of the more recent settlers of New Zealand, including art, multicultural heritages, history, science, society, technology and relationship with the land, and their place in the Pacific and the wider world.

General Findings

The Concept Statement for the Museum was noted by Government in 1990 and was incorporated into the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act in 1992. The new museum was mandated to provide, among other things, a “forum for the nation” and a powerful expression of “the total culture of New Zealand”. It was to be an “expression of the bicultural nature of the country” and a “statement of the nation’s identity”, assisting New Zealanders to better understand and to realise their aspirations as a culture and a people. In terms of the broad delivery of that mandate, the museum was required to offer “an enjoyable and enriching range of displays and activities that will encourage understanding”.

The Review Team has found that the 1992 Concept has, in large measure, been successfully achieved. Various described by interviewees as a work in progress and moving in the right direction, the Museum was generally regarded by those with whom we met as having achieved its concept at what might be described as its most ‘aspirational’ level. For instance, the extraordinarily high number of visits to Te Papa since its opening – some 10 times the number of visitors to the previous National Art Gallery – and the significant proportion of those who are repeat visitors, argues that the Museum has already begun to play a vital and relevant role in the lives of a diverse cross-section of the New Zealand community.

The demographic profile of Te Papa's visitors indicates that all age groups, visiting as family and other groups and as well as individuals, are well represented among Te Papa's visitors. Additionally, the findings of successive visitor surveys taken since opening reflect a consistently high level of satisfaction (93%) with the Museum experience as a whole.

To the extent that general visitor feedback has been negative about Te Papa, it has principally related to the difficulties experienced by many in wayfinding and the initial delivery of some front-of-house services. While these issues have been, or are being, addressed as part of the post-opening development of the Museum, the visitor research to date, which is demographic, psychographic and qualitative in nature, clearly evidences the real depth of support that the Museum has attained among New Zealanders. It speaks particularly of the Museum's accessibility and wide-ranging appeal to both New Zealanders and international visitors alike, and most particularly to children, youth and family groups. Notably, the representation of Maori people in the visitor numbers is higher than in the New Zealand population.

While the Te Papa experience is principally addressed to a broad audience, the vast majority of who rate it very highly, the Review Team also examined critical responses to the Museum in determining the extent to which the initial concept had been fulfilled. This recognises that the level of popular response to Te Papa, however impressive, can never entirely answer the critical concerns raised outside the Museum. Both must be considered when reviewing Te Papa's realisation of its Concept Statement.

The aspiration that Te Papa should become a "forum for the nation" has certainly been achieved in the sense that it has become the country's most visited and discussed cultural institution, although it was described by one interviewee as being more of a focus than a forum for debate. The Review Team notes, however, that Te Papa has been responsible for organising and hosting conferences, wananga and seminars that have also helped it to achieve that goal in more formal settings than a museum visit allows.

Te Papa has largely succeeded in becoming a powerful symbol of the bicultural nature of the country. Its depth of commitment to biculturalism has extended through its integration into the Museum's conceptual framework to permeate the nature and culture of the institution. The appointment of a senior Maori member of staff as Kaihautu is a visible signal of the importance that the Museum places on biculturalism.

Both Maori and non-Maori interviewees acknowledged that Te Papa's approach to biculturalism had been well sustained. In the terms of the Concept Statement, the Museum is concerned with "recognising the mana and significance of each of the two mainstreams of traditional and cultural heritage and providing the means for each to contribute effectively to

a statement of the nation's identity". Here, some of the sense of national pride, which the Museum Concept aimed to develop, has been located.

Issues

While the 1992 Concept has been substantially achieved it is also clear that certain elements of the Concept require further development and articulation. These include but are not limited to those parts that related to the new museum's inheritance, its collections, and aspects of their contextualisation and interpretation.

In almost all of the interviews conducted a level of concern was expressed that Te Papa seemed solely driven by the 'front-end' visitor experience. This response is understandable given the very public nature of the Museum's development and its statutory obligation to deliver a Museum experience of appeal to the broadest audience. While designed to meet the expectations of multiple target audiences, some museum exhibitions were described to the Review Team as lacking in clarity of intent or not having sufficient regard for the layering of interpretive information.

In order to extend as well as to nurture differing levels of understanding, a key element of the Concept, the Review Team urges Te Papa to address issues of clarity of intent and layering of interpretive information in exhibitions as a matter of priority.

Unified Collections

Unified collections and a multi-disciplinary approach to their presentation and interpretation are central tenets of the Concept that Te Papa has pursued, although this has been achieved with varying degrees of emphasis throughout its exhibitions. As was observed by one interviewee, this approach was frequently the basis of both museum and art museum exhibitions worldwide where, for example, works of art were combined with archaeological artefacts, furniture, works of decorative art and the like. The Review Team noted, moreover, that the Museum has presented collection-based exhibitions which make exclusive use of the art collections (for example *What's New*) and which draw on other art collections (for example *Collectors Choice*).

Awesome Forces

Awesome Forces was acknowledged by the Review Team and by several interviewees for its sound intellectual content combined with a high level of interactivity. This has been

achieved despite the lack of in-house expertise and with comparatively little in the way of supporting collection material. It was also apparent to the Review Team that the quality of *Awesome Forces* had been enhanced by a highly effective developmental and continuing partnership between Te Papa and the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences Ltd. and the Earthquake Commission.

Mountains to Sea

By contrast *Mountains to Sea* was said by several interviewees to adopt a more simplistic approach to its science and its interpretive strategies. Although *Mountains to Sea* endeavours to represent a range of objects drawn from the Museum's natural history collections, the stories which it tells are limited by the space available to them. Material and interpretive connections do exist within *Naturespace* (the adjacent Resource Centre), Te Papa OnScreen (the Museum's database containing information about the exhibitions their themes and objects, and available mainly in the Resource Centres associated with each of the main exhibitions), but these are not all equally self-evident links in the layering of information. The Review Team supports Te Papa's commitment to drawing these connections out and to developing a greater range of exhibition guides and publications in this area.

Mountains to Sea presents a descriptive view of the major ecosystems of New Zealand and some detail about the plants, animals and processes contributing to them. While this is an appropriate basis for an exhibition of this kind, several interviewees challenged the Museum's focus on what they described as approved science (rare and endangered species, conservation and the like) and asserted that more emphasis should be given to science which examined and challenged biological assumptions, in the same way that, say, *Parade* challenges the conventions of art and cultural histories. The Review Team noted that the Core Projects plan includes the future examination of topics such as biodiversity, cultural attitudes to natural heritage and the effects of rapid environmental change on living organisms.

Passports

There was agreement between the Review Team and those with whom we met that the social history exhibitions such as *Passports* were more successful realisations of the Concept than those that focussed on natural history. This was in part attributed to the extent of space given over to them and to their more highly developed and issues driven interactives, such as those on colonial immigration in *Passports*.

Parade

While the “unity of collections and capabilities” – a central tenet of the Concept – is a way of “present[ing] new and varied views of the insights into the richness of our cultural heritage”, it can also create partial and obscure views unless accompanied by coherently layered interpretive material.

The Review Team notes that exhibitions such as *Awesome Forces*, *Mountains to Sea*, and *Passports* reflect varying degrees of commitment to presenting unified collections, but in so doing they maintain an identifiable focus on their respective disciplines, namely geology, natural history and social history. However, it was also apparent to the Review Team and to a number of interviewees and media commentators, that some objects within the later stages of *Parade* (such as the refrigerator and the yacht) drew out sometimes confusing elaborations on, and relationships to, the principal discipline of art.

Parade has become by far the most discussed of all of Te Papa’s Day One exhibitions. This is perhaps less because of its use of works drawn from a range of collection areas, than because it sometimes proposes relationships between our visual and material cultures which are either unclear or unpersuasive. As is noted elsewhere in this report, under Term of Reference 2, not all of the narrative threads of *Parade* are equally self-evident. Some of its more deliberately provocative alignments have served only to underscore wider concerns expressed about Te Papa’s commitment to the presentation and interpretation of its art collections.

The Review Team urges Te Papa to vigorously pursue its stated intention to undertake summative evaluations of *Parade*’s communication and interpretive strategies to assist it in achieving greater clarity and consistency of purpose within the exhibit. At the same time, Te Papa should also pursue its intention to re-evaluate the key design and architectural elements of *Parade*. The Review Team recognises that the initial concept for *Parade*, including a number of planned evolutionary changes, has been compromised due to a lack of resource capability but it nonetheless urges Te Papa to address these concerns as a matter of priority.

Works of Art

While some exhibits contain little apparent evidence of the Concept’s proposed inter-disciplinary use of collections and other institutional resources, *Mana Whenua* and *Mountains to Sea* for example, others appear to adopt this position more determinedly. The Review Team agrees with one interviewee who suggested that works of art sometimes appeared to be of secondary consideration when utilised within essentially non-art-based

exhibits. However, it should be noted that the Museum's intention is to ensure that it preserves the integrity of works of art regardless of their display context.

The Review Team also notes the observation of another interviewee that objects drawn from the natural sciences collections were, at times, placed into contexts that served a larger narrative purpose more than they aided the understanding of the object itself. However, again, the Museum's position is that nowhere in the exhibitions have collection items been placed out of context: their placement is always consistent with the conceptual framework of the Museum.

The Review Team acknowledges that cultural appropriateness (eg. *Mana Whenua*) and the nature of particular exhibits (eg. *Bush City*) can also work to preclude the use of "unified collections" to any significant extent. We note, by way of example, that non-Maori works of art, including those used in specific narrative contexts in non-art based displays, have an importance and cultural integrity that deserves, depending on the nature of the work, the same respect reserved for Maori works. While acknowledging that different interpretive strategies are required to reflect different cultural worldviews, the challenge to Te Papa is to ensure that this expression of its bicultural principles is articulated with sufficient information and context to make such distinctions more apparent.

Exhibition Development

Section III of the Concept Statement, describes the three concepts on which Te Papa's exhibition development, among its many other activities, were to be based:

Papatuanuku: The earth on which we all live.

Tangata Whenua: Those who belong to the land by right of first discovery.

Tangata Tiriti: Those who belong to the land by right of the Treaty.

Notwithstanding their breadth, these concepts are substantially embodied in much that Te Papa has done in its permanent exhibits. They are in evidence through its natural history galleries, including *Awesome Forces*, *Mountains to Sea* and *Bush City*, and into its human history galleries, including *Mana Whenua*, *Signs of a Nation*, *Passports*, *Parade* and *Mana Pasifika*.

While this serves to meet the requirements of the founding Concept Statement at one level, it became evident to the Review Team that decisions needed to be made early in the project's development that effectively precluded a planned exhibition for the convergence of land and people. This seems to be an area in which the Museum could, in the broad terms of the Concept, very productively "express the total culture of New Zealand" by "drawing on the

total resources of the Museum". It is encouraging to note that planned exhibitions on Cook Strait and the New Zealand landscape could become ideal vehicles for this kind of exploration of New Zealand's unique identity as both a place and a people.

Mana Whenua and Signs of a Nation – Nga Tohu Kotahitanga

Arguably the most successful realisations of the Concept's vision for a bicultural Museum are expressed in *Signs of a Nation – Nga Tohu Kotahitanga*, the Treaty of Waitangi exhibition, in *Mana Whenua* and in *Te Marae*. *Signs of a Nation* represents the Treaty with the mana and dignity appropriate to a living and powerful symbol of the nation. Similarly, the Review Team considered *Mana Whenua* to be among the Museum's most resolved and coherent exhibits. While some interviewees suggested that the exhibit lacked sufficient regard for chronology and depth of comparative material, *Mana Whenua* celebrates Maori cultural and artistic achievement in a way that inspired most with whom we met.

Te Marae

Te Marae can also be read as one of the most potent expressions of the Museum's Concept. As was observed on more than one occasion by interviewees, *Te Marae* (physically and metaphysically) serves to project the marae into the new millennium. Its highly contemporary design has been the subject of some criticism by both Maori and Pakeha alike, as evidenced during the course of our interviews. (As noted previously, the Review Team was necessarily limited in its reaction to questions about this matter because it did not include a Maori person and this report cannot speak for Maori.)

However, the Review Team observed that *Te Marae* is a major contemporary work of art as much as it is a working marae; that it is built at the summit of a multi-storied building, disconnected from the earth, carved and moulded from composite wood, not timber, and that it includes Pakeha with Maori iconography. The Review Team is aware that Maori culture and art are far from static and immutable; further, it takes the view that *Te Marae* breaks with convention in a way that parallels the Museum's own break with conventional notions of what constitutes a museum. Certainly, it is a central place for large numbers of activities and ceremonies in a way that brings great life and importance to the Museum within New Zealand's culture.

National Services

The Review Team did not pursue any sustained inquiry into National Services, or the substantial structural re-organisation that occurred in Te Papa in 1994. It notes that this area of the Concept Statement (Section IV, Structure and Organisation), as described in the Executive Summary of the March 1992 Ministry of Cultural Affairs report, was held open for the Board and CEO to amend as they saw fit.

General Conclusions and Recommendations

The Review Team takes the view that Te Papa has largely worked within and successfully realised the conceptual framework that was adopted by Government in May 1992. It also acknowledges the importance of it having largely sustained that framework in a consistent way, given its available resources and its breadth of potential interpretation. We have nonetheless identified areas where the Museum should consider how to better articulate aspects of the Concept Statement. Were it to do so the Review Team believes that it would significantly assist it to better “understand and treasure the past, enrich the present and meet the challenges of the future”, a founding Purpose which remains central to its current Statement of Intent.

The Review Team’s recommendations concerning the Concept are therefore as follows:

Recommendation 1

That Te Papa pursues its intention to re-evaluate the key design and architectural elements of *Parade*.

Recommendation 2

That Te Papa should continue to pursue the notion of unified collections as axiomatic to its Concept but in its implementation the Museum should, at all times, aim to respect and acknowledge the integrity of all individual collections and collection objects. In particular, it should be recognised that works of art have particular meanings and contexts of production, which remain unique to them, notwithstanding that these same works of art might usefully contribute to a wider understanding of other independent narratives within the Museum context.

Recommendation 3

That Te Papa continues to examine ways in which it can re-interpret the story of convergence between the land and the peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. This story can only serve to further build on the goal to “encourage understanding of our natural and social environments”.

TERM OF REFERENCE 2: TE PAPA AND THE NATIONAL ART COLLECTION

Statement of Term of Reference

The second term of reference required us to “assess whether the national art collection is being presented to the public in the most effective way”³

Introduction

The 1992 legislation establishing the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa disestablished the former National Art Gallery and the National Museum and vested their collections in the new Museum. Currently Te Papa’s collection of art in the European tradition comprises some 13,000 works of New Zealand and international origin. These collections, historic and contemporary in nature, include painting, sculpture, applied arts and photography, as well as works on paper (drawings, watercolours, and prints). These latter items, which comprise 70% of the collection, are light sensitive and delicate in nature and may be shown for only six months in every eighteen-month period. (It should be noted that the entire collection is significant but is not the largest or most representative of art museum collections in New Zealand.)

Art is publicly presented in Te Papa in five principal spaces and is included in a number of other exhibitions. This is a consequence of the Museum’s decision to dismantle the discipline-specific structures of the former National Art Gallery (and National Museum) and to develop more holistic exhibitions about New Zealand and its place in the Pacific and the wider world. A key strategy, regarded by Te Papa as a strength, is its ability to draw on a range of collections from the visual arts and material culture to natural environment collections. Implicit in this policy was the adoption of a narrative approach to presentations.

The majority of Te Papa’s art exhibitions have been in the traditional art museum style and have been built on the interpretive, exhibition and programme practices of the former National Art Gallery. Examples are *Dream Collectors – 100 years of New Zealand Art* (a collaboration with the Auckland Art Gallery), *Pictura Britannica* (an exhibition of the work

³ The Review Team, in the context of this term of reference, principally concerned itself with art in the European tradition. We note, nevertheless, that art is shown in Te Papa in a very broad context and that in addition to art in the European tradition, both traditional and contemporary forms of Maori and Pacific art and material culture are extensively featured.

of young British artists) and *A Private View* (an exhibition of impressionist paintings from a private collection from the USA).

The Museum operates an extensive loans programme which, in the current financial year, includes over 800 items of art and applied art on loan to institutions for exhibition within New Zealand or overseas. Since opening, the Museum has undertaken a number of short-term exhibitions that have used the collections or drawn on the collections of other institutions and private individuals. This leads to greater exposure of the collections than would occur with permanent exhibitions alone, a situation common to every museum of every kind in the world. It has been pointed out to the Review Team that this exhibition programme is considerably more ambitious and extensive than the former National Art Gallery.

Reactions to the Presentation of the National Art Collection

While support for the integration of art collections with other Museum collections has been received from some opinion leaders in the New Zealand visual arts community, there has been criticism expressed by others - artists, art patrons and art followers - of the way this has been realised. It might be noted that the 1994 International Peer Review of the Day One exhibition conceptual plan considered that, within the art zone, greater prominence needed to be given to the principal Art in New Zealand exhibition. This exhibition, which became *Parade*, was considered to be the key exhibition in which the unfolding of New Zealand's vision through art would be revealed. Further, the presentation of major works of New Zealand art would be seen alongside the contextualised interpretation of art, referencing other exhibitions elsewhere in the building. The 1994 Peer Review Team strongly supported this approach.

In addition to *Parade* Te Papa opened with several other art exhibitions and within a few weeks of opening other exhibitions opened, followed by further travelling and temporary exhibitions.

It is the criticisms of the art presentation which have received the most attention. The issues include:

- Overall presentation of works of art and the extent to which the various exhibitions sufficiently represent the total art collection of the Museum in terms of number of works presented at any one time and the representation of particular individual artists;
- The nature of the spaces, particularly the architectural aspects of the spaces, and the relationship of the spaces within the building including the quality of wayfinding and the

effect of these matters on the 'art experience' (the Boulevard Gallery is generally excluded from detailed criticism of these matters);

- The manner of presentation of the non-Maori material compared with the presentation of Maori taonga;
- The level of scholarship revealed in the presentations; and

- In particular, in respect of *Parade*, the paradigms that form the basis of the arrangement and juxtaposition of works of art from the collection with other non-art objects, and the extent to which the curatorial rationale lying behind this is clearly articulated through the exhibition.

The Response of Te Papa

The issues surrounding the display of art at Te Papa were the subject of a report of the Te Papa Board dated October 1999 entitled, "Strategy for the Display of the Visual Arts at Te Papa".

In summary and in general terms the Board saw the need to provide greater opportunity to display works of art in more accessible ways for those audiences seeking conventional display approaches to the visual arts. A re-evaluation of the way in which space is used was also proposed, with a view to increasing the space available for the display of art. The Board's report acknowledged that the Museum's approach to programming over time, rather than the installation of fixed displays, means exposure to more rather than less of the national art collection.

The concerns dealt with in the report include:

- The perceived limited use being made of Te Papa's art collection and the possible consequence of that on future custodianship of the collection;
- The lack of traditional style art exhibitions in the programme;
- The frequency of changing exhibitions; and
- Whether the proposed communications strategy would reach the community of interest disaffected by Te Papa's approach to art.

The strategies adopted by the Board to address these issues comprise the following:

- Increase the ratio of art and related exhibitions in Te Papa's programme, with the Boulevard or the Tower Gallery having an art exhibition in place at all times, and utilising other spaces within Te Papa for art exhibitions including the level three concourse;
- Develop the Aorangi Room as a credible and evolving space for the display of art;
- Develop the Ericsson Zone as a space where the emphasis is on short duration exhibitions of art. In the first instance the focus will be on new acquisitions and contemporary works;
- Improve the Ilott Gallery space, strengthen its programme and increase the pace of change in this space;
- Undertake a space audit in 2000/2001 financial year with a view to increasing the available public space given to art;
- Improve communication and access to information about the art programme within the building;
- Develop a communication strategy that engages the disaffected segment of the art audience and encourages them to view Te Papa in a more positive light; and
- Improve access to collections in storage.

The Review Team urges the museum to continue to pursue these strategies.

From the outset Te Papa set itself the important task of extending the Museum's traditional audience. The Museum deliberately adopted strategies that privileged the broad audience. Following research and benchmarking it set a particular style of labelling and interpretation including the nature and length of the label wording. (Research conducted at the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Denver Art Museum dealing with interpretation is dealt with later in this report.)

Layers of information additional to those in the exhibition itself are provided, including through Te Papa OnScreen. There can be no doubt that these strategies have been successful: the Museum's internal research confirms that a large proportion of the Museum's audience are using and enjoying the exhibitions of art on display. (The Museum's research suggests that the number of visits to Te Papa is some 10 times the number of annual visits to the former National Art Gallery.)

The Review Team notes and supports Te Papa achievements to date with regard to many aspects of its management and presentation of the art collection, as it does the concerns articulated and addressed in the Board's October 1999 Visual Arts at Te Papa strategy paper. It urges continued implementation of these strategies.

Issues

One interviewee described Te Papa's approach to the exhibition of art as being a "work in progress". The comment was expanded further by the remark that Te Papa was "not a place beautifully articulated for the contemplation of art... but an institution driven by a powerful, democratic notion of explaining New Zealand". Importantly, it was noted, "people left the building with smiles on their faces".

In the interviews conducted by the Review Team, those critics of the art at Te Papa sought a mode of presentation for art broadly similar to that which they found in major art museums abroad. It is important to note that these opinions seldom denied the concept of collections integration which powerfully underlies Te Papa's interpretive proposition; indeed interviewees were often aware of successful exhibitions abroad where art objects and other materials are combined effectively and meaningfully.

In the interviews, best art museum practice was generally described as including or permitting:

- Exhibition spaces scaled to the value of the collections, which afford appropriate dignity to the objects, and which impart a sense of probity and depth to their interpretation;
- Providing access to a body of work which gives depth and range to the understanding of art and which acts as a source of reference;
- Providing a range of interpretive media that has a sound scholarly base, is informative, respectful, and is responsive to the community's needs at varying levels;
- Allowing art objects to be exhibited with other cultural or scientific material in meaningful and self-evident relationships;
- Concern with the 'real' and authentic experience of art; and
- Ensuring high levels of scholastic endeavour underpin all collecting, exhibition, and interpretation and publishing activity whether of a scholarly or popular nature.

Integration of collections: *Parade*

Criticism has been expressed of *Parade*; indeed, more criticism has been focused on this exhibition than perhaps any other part of the Museum. In summary, questions were raised as to the sustainability of the exhibition, its success as a demonstration of the central proposition for the concept of integrated collections and the clarity of its interpretative mode. Other comment was made to the Review Team about the ironic nature of some of the text, the stridency of some elements of the graphic design and the apparent absence of a storyline.

Interviewees remarked too on the availability of adequate layers of information, the matter of intrusion – auditory overflow - of a video interview upon the accompanying art works and, in certain cases, the appropriateness of choice and adjacency of both art and design objects. The refrigerator next to the McCahon painting – with its stature and solemnity – and the implications of ‘thumbs up/thumbs’ down interpretive devices and the nature of the questions they pose were commonly made criticisms by interviewees and have also been noted in the media. These criticisms, to an extent, arise in the later sections of the exhibition, with some of the earlier material seeming less controversial and more appropriate in its presentation.

Even though *Parade* is not the sole or even principal art exhibition and does not represent Te Papa’s entire approach to art and visual culture, it has become the focus for a raft of more general, less substantial criticisms. The Review Team acknowledges that it is unreasonable to expect the exhibition to carry a responsibility beyond its concept and stated intention but it is, nevertheless, unlikely that that criticism will abate until changes are effected within *Parade*.

Summative evaluation of and qualitative research into a cross-section of audience responses to the exhibition’s interpretive strategies, narratives, presentation methods and design approaches should be directed at improving the exhibition’s ability to accommodate the critical reactions it invites. The Review Team encourages Te Papa to expedite this work, which it understands is scheduled to begin.

The Museum’s research will identify appropriate solutions. However, the Review Team’s view at this stage is that they would concern concept; communication of Te Papa’s other programme opportunities for art; the amount of information about the objects in *Parade*; the choices, linkages and layering of information about those objects; and the positioning and design of the exhibition’s graphic identity.

While the integration of collections is not confined to *Parade*, other exhibitions are much less controversial. Criticism is generally focussed on the use of art for ‘furnishing’ purposes rather than as a significant element in a display’s proposition. (Critics whose position is that the collections are the proper central focus of exhibitions suggest the integration of art in

some areas is more the product of an applied ideology than a useful interpretive device.) Issues such as the visibility of works of art and the impact of their visibility on the prevailing aesthetic, especially where it affects or sets a tone for contemplation of the works themselves, is a commonly voiced issue. The Review Team is of the view that works of art are often used intelligently and with good purpose in other displays.

Access to the National Art Collection

The prevailing criticism of Te Papa's approach to its art collection has led some people to assert that a separate new national art museum should be created or the collections moved to another collecting and exhibiting institution; others talk of proposed structural changes that would increase the relative level of appointment of art history experts. (This last is something entirely antithetical to the approach taken by the Board to organisational structure across the whole museum.)

It has already been noted that the National Art Collection is not the largest or most significant in New Zealand and that more than 70% of it comprises works on paper. The Review Team knows from its inspections that the collections are well housed and from discussions that the Museum operates an extensive loan programme and has undertaken a number of short-term exhibitions giving greater exposure to works.

The Review Team believes that significant revision of the spaces available to art and the presentation of the history and traditions of New Zealand art should occur. It notes that this issue is dealt with in the Board's 1999 Visual Arts Display Strategy and hopes that the strategies agreed to at that time will adequately address the need for a constant strong presence of the story of New Zealand's art history and traditions in future exhibitions. The Review Team notes the overwhelming majority of collection items are works on paper that can only be exhibited for comparatively short periods of time.

Allocation of art exhibition spaces.

Currently art is presented in five principal spaces and included in a number of other exhibitions. The major space on level four devoted to *Parade* has already been discussed. The Ericsson Zone presents a range of contemporary, recent acquisition art works in a familiar art museum mode. The Ilott Gallery displays changing exhibitions of works on paper. The Aorangi Room, a mezzanine space, and the Boulevard Gallery also display art. The Tower Gallery, the main space for temporary travelling exhibitions, has been used for displays of art on a number of occasions since the Museum opened in 1998.

The Boulevard Gallery is the only space with which interviewees and critics seem to be entirely comfortable: it is a tall, long gallery of some significant scale and dignity. The Ilott Gallery, as a throughway, is unsuitable for any sustained contemplation of the exhibited works. The Aorangi Room, although allowing quiet contemplation, is not only isolated from other spaces in the Museum and difficult to reach but possesses a visually heavy barrel vaulted ceiling that presses down upon the works of art shown in this space in the view of some interviewees and others.

The Review Team believes that in addition to the unevenness in quality of these spaces, a significant problem is the lack of a coherent circulation path and it observes the 'scattering' of art spaces as a weakness. It is, however, satisfied with the quality of the Boulevard Gallery and the mode of exhibition in the Ericsson Zone. It believes that some redesign and reconfiguration of the Ilott Gallery is necessary to overcome the corridor nature of this space, and is of the view that the Aorangi Room is difficult to find and is particularly unsatisfactory as an exhibition space for works of art.

The Review Team supports the concept of a 'central' art exhibition, in this case *Parade*, which places art in a wider social context and meaning through the device of integrated collections. However, it recommends that it be located with direct adjacencies to galleries which show art in more traditional art museum terms, and which concentrate on the presentation of exhibitions devoted to the history and traditions of New Zealand art.

The Review Team was pleased to note the Te Papa Board's October 1999 decision to ensure that an art exhibition was in place at all times in either the Boulevard or Tower Gallery.

The Review Team urges the Board to complete its review of spaces with a view to increasing the amount of space for the display of the visual arts, to improve the coherency of these spaces and to improve circulation paths for visitor. The Review Team is encouraged that work is already being carried out to these ends.

Scholarship and Interpretation

All interviewees expressed reservations or criticism of the extent of scholarship and interpretation provided with the art exhibitions. Interpretive labelling of works of art was frequently criticised. The ironic style sometimes employed and the minimal information provided was criticised. It was suggested that the art labels give the illusion of visitor participation but leave the viewer uninformed, that audiences are intelligent enough to deserve more information than is currently provided.

As already mentioned, Te Papa approached communication and interpretation of art in a way that privileged the broad audience: indeed, the Museum's mandate requires it to extend that audience. Limiting the amount of information on labels and providing additional information elsewhere, such as on Te Papa OnScreen, was the deliberate resulting strategy. Te Papa OnScreen is an excellent database and will grow in time to become a very powerful interpretation tool: the Museum's research shows that large numbers of adults do use it. But its location in Resource Centres, to some extent removed from general circulation, can mean that it is difficult for some to find. Further, the Resource Centres themselves seem to some to be designed principally for children and can therefore be intimidating to adults. Few interviewees were aware of the existence of Te Papa OnScreen and thus the valuable interpretive layer that it contributes. The Hector Library, an inviting space to those wishing for further study, is adjacent to the Boulevard Gallery.

The Review Team was impressed with the quality of thought expressed in interviews with members of the art unit staff and noted that one position in that area was currently unfilled. Views were expressed about additional appointments and the levels of those appointments. The Review Team is of the view that a person substantially experienced in art history would be an appropriate appointment. We are aware that the current basis of the organisational structure of Te Papa is not a functional one with divisions into natural environment, history, art and so on.

Publications

Concern was expressed in interviews about the lack of an appropriate hierarchy of publishing in all areas of Te Papa's operations, and in art in particular. A policy and accompanying programme on publishing from leaflet to scholarly papers, to populist articles and books to monograph works is required. Te Papa does have a publishing policy in place and a number of significant publications have been produced since opening. The Review Team acknowledges that not every exhibition requires a substantial publication – particularly in the case of those subjects where significant quality publications already exist - and that care is required in commissioning publications so that the result is a marketable proposition rather than storerooms full of books. Further review of the policy and practice in this area would seem appropriate.

The Review Team recommends that a review of art labelling, interpretive media and art publishing be conducted, and that standards be developed for the Museum's interpretive programmes which meet the needs of both the populist/generalist audience and a committed art interest audience.

General Conclusions and Recommendations

The Review Team reached the following conclusions in assessing the effectiveness of the public presentation of the National Art Collection:

- The concept of integrated collections forming an interpretive core throughout the Te Papa experience is sound and certainly is challenging. Significant thought and consideration has gone into the selection and interpretation of much of the art presentations and the analysis of the audience requirements.
- Much of the interpretation of art presentations is a focus for criticism. The approach to communication and the interpretative strategies which privilege the broad audience are deliberate strategies based on developed understanding of best practice in those museums seeking to reach a wider audience. The strategies adopted in response to the significant criticisms have not always been clearly communicated. Greater effort to provide an appropriately supportive and explanatory environment for critical response might result in better understanding of the concepts and strategies in the art presentations focused specifically on *Parade*⁴.
- Te Papa OnScreen is a significant and developing resource but its accessibility could be improved. The style and content of labels, interpretive media (including audiovisual presentations) and visual art publishing are a focus of concern for some.
- Sections of the exhibition *Parade* – which Te Papa senior management correctly point out (and the Review Team acknowledges) does not constitute the Museum's entire or only approach to art display – do not sufficiently achieve the intended purpose of challenging the interpretation of New Zealand material culture and cultural traditions and their interconnections.
- The current spaces allocated to art lack self-evident connections and appropriate adjacencies are insufficient in size and, in some cases, architecturally unsuitable. The Review Team is pleased, however, that the Tower Gallery will continue to be used for art presentations and that when art is not shown there, that there will be art presentations in the Boulevard Gallery.
- The strategy to stage temporary exhibitions that the Museum has adopted, giving greater exposure to the collection over time, is entirely appropriate.

⁴The Review Team was informed that Te Papa responded to issues as early as April 1999 and implemented a strategy to respond to its critics.

- There is substantial awareness at Board level and amongst senior management of the challenges and of the difficulties posed by the approach to art presentations and a special policy and relevant strategies have been formulated at Board level to address these and related issues.
- The resources available for scholarly activity associated with the art collections and their presentation should be increased.

The Review Team's recommendations concerning the National Art Collection are therefore as follows:

Recommendation 4

That the planned evaluations of the visitor experience within the major exhibition spaces, especially *Parade*, be undertaken by the Museum as soon as possible. The evaluations should be both quantitative and qualitative and include summative evaluation of interpretive strategies, narratives, and presentation methods and design approaches. They should focus on, among other things, linkages between existing layers of visitor experience, collection materials and information sources. The results of those evaluations should be effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders and, through the media, to the Museum's audience generally so as to extend understanding of the Museum and its activity.

Recommendation 5

That the Museum's plan to review, increase and potentially reallocate spaces significantly featuring works of art, as well as redesign and reconfigure those spaces, be implemented as a matter of urgency. And, that appropriate consideration be given to the provision of a central art exhibition space, with adjacencies between galleries, showing art in a wider discipline-specific context.

Recommendation 6

That a review of the labelling, interpretive media and publishing related to the art collection be conducted, and that standards be developed for the Museum's interpretive programmes which meet the needs of both the populist/generalist audience and a committed art-interested audience.

Recommendation 7

That the resources available for scholarly activity associated with the art collection be increased.

Recommendation 8

That further consideration is given to the use of audio visual/audio devices in exhibitions to minimise unnecessary intrusiveness.

TERM OF REFERENCE 3: SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH

Statement of Term of Reference

The third term of reference required us to “examine whether the National Museum has upheld scholarship and research values”.

Background

Scholarship was important in both the National Museum (previously the Dominion Museum) and the National Art Gallery. Both had important collections although the quality of the collections was not uniform. By 1984, the National Museum’s collections were particularly strong in the biological area and in Maori ethnography and archaeology. The National Art Gallery’s collections were generally focussed on art in the European tradition. Museum practice was generally similar to what would be found in moderately sized museums of that time. This included collections management, scholarship and public programming including exhibition development.

The relevance of these statements is that the expectation held by some in the scholarly community is that Te Papa should continue to provide the same kind of access to collections, continue publications of the same kind and display the collections in approximately the same manner, and that this past practice constituted good museum practice. It is important to point out, as noted elsewhere in this report, that although substantial additional space has been obtained and refurbished to house some of the collections and staff, no staff in the research and scholarship area have been made redundant and collections have developed actively since 1992.

Perhaps the most drastic change in the 10 years prior to the opening of Te Papa was that a number of senior staff were seconded to positions with primary responsibility for Day One exhibitions. Attention to some aspects of the Museum’s functions was perceived to have changed, with less emphasis apparently being given to scholarly activities.

Issues

We directed our consideration of exhibitions and interviews to the extent to which the policies set out in the document “Speaking with Authority” (see below) were realised in respect of access to the collections and accumulated knowledge through exhibitions. This

included the interpretation of exhibitions in the main spaces, physical access to collections and publications relating to research.

Notwithstanding the sometimes fraught relationship between curators and other scholars and staff within museums over control of programmes and interpretation to the public, which some must think is a near mandatory feature of the daily dynamics of museums, the bringing of scholarship to public communication is essential. The report "Museums Australia 1975"⁵ said it well, "Without scholarship the museum becomes a hucksters market". Whilst some scholars will assert that their work progresses best with minimal direction as to outputs and relevance, few institutions now take this stand, even in countries like Germany and the USA where outlays on research and development are substantial. Emphasis is given to mixed funding and to public benefits, those leading to economic gain being variously emphasised. Te Papa, required to produce certain specific outcomes beyond care of the collections, has an obligation to direct its resources to those; at the same time it must do so in a manner which encourages productivity and creativity.

There are models that assist in this beyond assertions about peer review, sometimes described as the worst form of assessment save all others. These include encouragement of communication and review by outside experts of programmes and performance⁶. They also include ensuring staff having frequent contact with their peers and with clients. In the case of Te Papa this includes with government departments and other agencies commissioning and funding research, as well as other academics and scholars in universities.

Museums such as The Natural History Museum (London), the Field Museum (Chicago) and the Australian Museum (Sydney) maintain large collections, pursue active public programmes and substantial programmes of research and scholarship relative to other museums in those countries. All have developed considerably elaborated guidelines for public programming as well as carefully reviewed research programming. Scientific staff are active in developing links with government and non-government organisations in areas such as biodiversity.

The Original Concept for Te Papa

The clauses of the approved Concept Statement for Te Papa (see the chapter dealing with the Concept) relevant to scholarship emphasise that it will be a national museum powerfully expressing the total culture of New Zealand, expressing the bicultural nature of the country, recognising the mana and significance of each of the two mainstreams of traditional and

⁵Pigott, P. et al, 1975. *Museums in Australia 1975*. Canberra: AGPS.

⁶Quinn, J B, *Managing Knowledge Based and Professional Intellect*, (Chapter 8, p 241-292) in *Intelligent Enterprise*, New York: the Free Press, 1992

cultural heritage, valuing the collections previously under the care of the National Art Gallery and National Museum which it will house safely and appropriately to ensure their preservation for future generations and as a total resource able to be drawn on to present new and varied views of and insights into the richness of our cultural heritage.

Further, it emphasised that “the work in natural history and systematic biology for which the National Museum is already renowned will be continued and improved”, that broader studies and presentations of the natural environment and of the interrelation of people with their surroundings, would be developed. New opportunities were to be provided to care for and present the treasures ... of the Maori people and develop a better understanding of Maori life and culture. The Museum would develop the collections, displays and activities that relate to fine arts and to applied and decorative arts to levels not previously attainable.

And, it said, “greater emphasis will be placed on the development of collections, displays and activities in the area of New Zealand’s social, cultural and material history”; with activity in the areas of prehistory, specifically in the prehistory, history and culture of Pacific Island peoples, to be continued

Review and Policy Development

Te Papa has developed its scholarship and Mātauranga Māori policies through two substantial reviews by panels of New Zealand and overseas experts in 1994 and again in 1997⁷. From the 1996 policy statement, “Speaking with Authority”, Te Papa has developed a series of core projects with outputs focusing on the public and on other important stakeholder groups including the scientific and academic communities.

In 1994 a review was conducted by museum experts in the area of scholarship from New Zealand and overseas and chaired by Dr Margriet Théron, a senior scientist in the New Zealand government. It sought a central role for scholarship and research in all that Te Papa did. This included the maintenance of research activity, reflection of the human environment, wide dissemination of research outputs, additional resources and identification of the core (long-term) research programme, along with a clear policy and exploration of external funding possibilities. Amongst other things, the review recommended a ministerial review of the Board’s composition to ensure that membership comprised appropriate expertise and experience.

The Museum’s response agreed with much of this but the demands of Day One exhibitions were emphasised as were a number of other matters. (The Museum’s statute does not provide for a board that includes persons representing particular disciplines that the Museum

⁷Dr Des Griffin was a member of both reviews

is concerned with. The former National Art Gallery and Museum had such a board. (We have been informed that this model was rejected at the time the new legislation was drafted on the grounds that it did not provide good governance and was liable to lead to factionalism which was not in the best interests of the institution, especially one which had such a broad collection range.)

The comprehensive policy “Speaking with Authority Scholarship and Maturanga at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa – A Strategy” was formulated in 1995 by a Museum Committee and presented to the Museum Board in February/March 1996. November 1997 saw the discussion of Scholarship and Maturanga by another group of New Zealand and overseas experts (including some of those who participated in the 1994 review) together with staff from Te Papa at a special hui.

“Speaking with Authority” focuses on four themes within the context of a mission statement that highlights the concept of the Museum “as a forum for presenting, exploring and preserving our cultural heritage and knowledge of our natural environment...”

“Speaking with Authority” is the basis for research and scholarship in the Museum. Its four themes are 1. Becoming Aotearoa, 2. The Peopling of Aotearoa New Zealand, 3. Life in Aotearoa New Zealand and 4. the Museum serving the Community. The document elaborates the themes, gives example of appropriate research topics, resources needed and appropriate directions. It is from “Speaking with Authority” that the Museum approaches its exhibitions. The Museum acknowledges two streams of knowledge based in tangata tiriti or western systems of knowledge and Maturanga or Maori systems of knowledge.

It was apparent from the early planning phase that Te Papa would need to operate from two sites in order to accommodate its collections as well as its complex range of activities. Te Papa has acquired substantial accommodation for important parts of its collections, the conduct of much of its research and conservation of collections in Tory Street, one kilometre away from the main Cable Street site of the Museum. Funding for this was derived principally from the Museum’s capital budget and a small amount from the sale of the Buckle Street buildings that housed the original National Museum and National Art Gallery. Collections are housed and research is undertaken on both sites. Notwithstanding the large number of people at the Tory Street site, there are more curatorial and collections management staff at the main Cable Street site.

Although physical separation of some staff and collections from exhibitions and other staff and collections might be regretted, because of the added difficulty of gaining a shared view amongst staff of a common set of goals and values, it is important to note that a number of strategies and practices are in place to minimise the negative effects of this separation. All staff participate in the Hosts programme which places staff in the public areas of the

Museum for at least one week every year. The Review Team have been informed that every staff member has 'a base' at the Cable Street building, that some of the regular meetings and staff development/training sessions are held at Tory Street and various staff forums and social functions are held there, the General Manager Museum Resources will be located there, the leadership team meets there once a month and the Board will meet there twice a year.

Implementation of Policy

From "Speaking with Authority" the Museum has developed a number of core projects and sub-projects for research leading to events, publications, exhibitions, and some involving joint ventures. All identify outcomes of some kind rather than projects for their own sake and specify the "owner" of the project and a completion date. Criteria have been developed within the specific objectives established for the Te Papa concept, eg. customer focus, bicultural, speaks with authority, together with some other criteria; sub-projects passing through this examination or 'sieve' are evaluated against audience, resources, timing and exhibition programme. Among the more recent outputs have been websites/internet pages devoted to such subjects as seaweeds and their uses and the oeuvre of Colin McCahon.

Navigation and voyaging, exploration of cultural attitudes to the natural environment, what it is that leads to people and things being an icon and an annual forum programme exploring the future and major travelling exhibitions are among the sub-projects. So are consulting services and the development of e-commerce and package tours for domestic and international visitors. These are relevant to the Museum's mission and are appropriately ambitious and wide-ranging projects. The criteria are indicative of very careful decision-making assuming the appropriate application of them and that the information informing the decision is of sufficiently high quality.

Funding for some aspects of the pursuit of scholarship does appear to have been restricted judging by general commentary of Te Papa senior management. For instance, some positions have been held open recently due to uncertainty about future funding levels. A letter of comfort from Government followed by the increased funding announced by the Prime Minister on 18 May 2000 is allowing filling of these positions. There are several areas of research including botany and ichthyology (fishes) where substantial research grants have been obtained from external funding agencies indicating the relevance and quality of the Museum's research.

Te Papa has developed a large number of partnerships with, among others, government agencies and departments, including research agencies such as the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences (GNS), the National Institute for Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) and the Ministry of Research Science and Technology, universities and large

numbers of iwi throughout the country. These partnerships concern research, exhibition development and teaching.

Perceptions of Scholarship and Maturanga

The perceptions held by the scholarly community outside the Museum vary on issues such as the quality of scholarship from the research, its funding by outside grants and its application to exhibitions and publications. In some cases, areas of endeavour were criticised by scholars in those disciplines but praised by others who are expert in other disciplines.

Amongst the specific issues addressed in discussions were the priority assigned to research relative to other activities and past times, relative attention to Maturanga and western systems of knowledge, depth of interpretation of items on display and access to collections. Interpretation of collections is taken up elsewhere in this report.

There was discussion also of the relative number of 'experts' in the Museum compared with past times. Indicators such as external grants gained and scholarly publications achieved are widely regarded as indicators of research achievement. It is fair to say that grants gained now are substantial. (At the time the National Museum was functioning the New Zealand government research enterprise was managed in a different manner.) There is an array of publications including books, book chapters, popular articles, technical papers/reports and research papers in scholarly refereed journals representing part of the output of scientific staff.

There are several areas of activity in the Museum where the perceptions of some university academics and others with scholarly interests in the Museum and its collections differ significantly from the practices that the Museum considers it is following. In some areas of research and collection acquisition the levels of activity are higher and reach a higher quality than is recognised. Suggestions were made that Te Papa meet specially with staff of related institutions to share information about research projects, fieldwork and priorities and directions for the future so that there might be better mutual understanding and co-operation. The Review Team suggests that the Museum give consideration to some form of effective meeting and communicating with academics and similar people for the purpose of exchanging information about programs and activities and generally communicating present and future plans.

Several interviewees noted that in their opinion Maturanga was not really expressed in many of the exhibitions, specifically mentioning the *Mountains to the Sea* exhibition.

Much of the discourse on museums, which historically have had a focus on scholarship, concerns the current level of resourcing for that. Related to this and all reflections on the past

is a feeling that there are fewer experts around than in past times. Both of these issues concern scholars reflecting on Te Papa at this time.

Access to collections is a performance target and is reported on in the Museum's Annual Report. The Review Team was told that very few requests for access are denied. Some interviewees, however, spoke of problems with access. Te Papa senior managers informed us that the Museum has introduced greater levels of management of resource demands for requests for access, both to collections and expertise of staff, because of the substantial staff time involved and the demands of other projects. The negotiation of access is currently managed by middle management staff within this policy rather than by the curator or collection manager. Certainly, requests for access both constitutes an important service for a museum and is very demanding of time and resources.

Facilities for further inquiry include the Inquiry Centre (Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) database) and the Hector Library which the Review Team was informed are all designed for and provide varying levels access for researchers. It noted that here are also a number of formal arrangements with other organisations for knowledge exchange and joint venture. The FAQ database that the Museum has developed on its Intranet makes a substantial contribution to efficient response to questions from the public.

In respect of exhibitions and publications, interviews brought forth consistent themes and concerns. The vast majority of scholars in disciplines with which the Museum is concerned (as opposed to so-called 'critics' and journalists) accepted, sometimes with important reservations, the bringing together of items from the collections of different kinds and the parallel presentation of Mātauranga Māori and western systems of knowledge.

Some of the public commentary by historians has concerned the omission from exhibitions within *Mana Whenua* of certain information such as massacres in the Chatham Islands. Te Papa maintains that the people of that group basically control information about a cultural group, a position based on commitment to the two streams of knowledge inherent in the main objectives establishing Te Papa. Whether critics of the Museum's approach have considered issues such as who has the right to control how a people's culture is presented is not known by the Review Team. Information on a range of issues, including massacres, in addition to what is available in the main exhibition areas can, however, be accessed through Te Papa OnScreen.

Exhibition Interpretation

One of the most important points concerning the consideration of the exhibitions is that Te Papa is committed to unified collections and to a holistic interpretation of its exhibitions, which intrinsically means different areas of knowledge and understanding brought to bear on

a particular topic. There is variation in the view on the extent to which scholarship is evident in the interpretation of some material as well as the juxtaposition of items of different kinds. These are issues taken up under Term of Reference 2 dealing with the National Art Collection.

A number of art displays in other museums do contain material of different kinds such as, furniture, masks and so on. There was a diversity of opinion about exhibition spaces such as *Mana Whenua* and *Mana Pasifica* concerning the placing of older material together with contemporary material. Whilst some interviewees objected others considered it quite suitable. (The Review Team is aware that indigenous cultures see the past as continuous with the present.) Several interviewees, whilst accepting the placing of older and contemporary material together nevertheless expressed regret that more of the older material was not on display. The smallness of the space was frequently noted.

There was much commentary about the text interpretation. The focus of the commentary was on the layers of interpretation, sufficiency of information for visitors of different ages and the encouragement of reflection on and contemplation of the object. (This matter is also dealt with elsewhere under Term of Reference 4 in a discussion of learning in museums. Exploration of this issue in several art museums suggests giving principal attention to the novice rather than the expert.) The amount of labelling varies but is relatively short and consistent with standard exhibition policy. The interpretation is supported by printed material, by audioguides and by Te Papa OnScreen. This is typically an area of debate amongst frequent museum goers and scholars: some interviewees wished for more and some for less, some noticed labels, some didn't.

Frequently there was concern or even annoyance expressed about audio information and 'sound leakage' that intruded or controlled contemplation of items in the display. The Review Team noted that Te Papa monitors this. There was concern expressed by some also about lighting levels in some exhibitions, including the extent to which some objects were lit. (Some of these cases concerned objects which for conservation reasons require minimal lighting.)

Access from Exhibitions to Objects and Information

Some individuals expressed a wish for access to more items than are currently on display, such as more butterflies, more examples of the art of particular artists, more examples of Maori musical instruments.

It certainly is possible to pursue particular topics to great depth. To find out more about certain objects or statements in an exhibition visitors can use the Resource Centre or access Te Papa OnScreen to explore the particular exhibition and object type or identify relevant

publications. This can be achieved with the help of Host staff if necessary. Visitors can also access relevant publications through the library or obtain other publications in this way. Alternately, the relevant staff member in the Museum can be consulted to provide information about relevant scholars outside the Museum who can give additional information.

The Museum's own audience research shows that in fact adults make substantial use of Te Papa OnScreen. However, for some adults, who perceive that the Resource Centres (where this facility is most often available) are designed for children, access would be increased were it made available on the floor of exhibitions as well as in its present locations. The Museum is aware of this and is planning implementation.

General Conclusions and Recommendations

We are asked to assess whether Te Papa has upheld scholarship and research values. We agree that it has in respect of the following:

- There is a clear set of policies, projects developed from them and criteria for assessment as to whether projects should be accepted, the projects are identified as to the person accountable for achievement of them and deadlines are identified.
- Accommodation outside the main Cable Street building for collections has been obtained and appropriately refurbished and the standard of this accommodation is substantially better than anything in the history of the Museum including the former National Museum and National Art Gallery.
- Scholarship contributes to many areas of the Museum's endeavours, including contracts with other government agencies, exhibitions, and in consideration of acquisitions and the exploration of return of taonga to iwi.
- Access to collections and accumulated knowledge is provided through a variety of means including audioguides, in some cases printed material, including guides for some exhibitions, and particularly Te Papa OnScreen. The Review Team endorses plans to provide access to Te Papa OnScreen within the main exhibitions as well as elsewhere.
- There is considerable evidence of biculturalism and the "twin streams of knowledge" in exhibitions, although some debate about this is evident and the extent to which that this approach was implemented was seen to vary among some exhibitions.
- The Museum's publishing policy states explicitly that every publication shall be at least cost-neutral and subsidy is sought where appropriate. The seeking of publication

sponsorship is to be encouraged, as is the advancement of publications that fill gaps in the market and enhance understanding and knowledge of the Museum's collections.

The Review Team's recommendations concerning Scholarship and Research Values are therefore as follows:

Recommendation 9

That the planned exhibition proposal (currently listed within the Museum's core projects), concerning navigation and the peopling of the Pacific, one of the central issues concerning the history of New Zealand and its peoples, proceed.

TERM OF REFERENCE 4: OTHER MATTERS CONCERNING EXHIBITIONS

Statement of Term of Reference

The last term of reference required us to, “advise whether there are other issues arising from Te Papa’s exhibitions that should be considered in relation to the presentation of a national museum”.

There is an important issue that relates to much of the content of the other terms of reference and is central to exhibition programmes. We deal with it here.

Exhibition Interpretation, Learning and Audience Research

One of the objectives of Te Papa is that it will be customer focused. This has guided the way in which it presents itself in its public areas and the way it presents its exhibitions. There are issues arising from this that concern:

- Whether museums are about ideas rather than things;
- What customer focus means in a museum including the nature of the museum visitor experience; and
- What constitutes effective learning in informal settings like museums?

Te Papa has been criticised heavily, particularly in the media, for being too simple, for presenting text and other interpretation that is unchallenging and for allowing that any idea is as valid as any other, ie. that it is postmodern. Most stridently, it has been criticised particularly by some scholars for ‘dumbing-down’, for being like a Disney-style theme park.

Museums are about ideas

Whilst museums have long been considered to be about objects, this has recently been challenged. Distinguished museologist Stephen E. Weil⁸ asserts that the issue for museums is how to make the underlying values of the objects in them manifest, how to bring them up to the consciousness of the visitor so as to make a real difference to the lives of people. Weil

⁸ Emeritus Senior Scholar at the Smithsonian Institution and former Deputy Director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Stephen S Weil (1988), *The Real Business of Museums: Ideas or Things? Muse* 7(1), 28-38, 1989

argues that it is in the realm of thought, not collections management, that the answers are to be found. This issue was also dealt with extensively in the landmark publication by the American Association of Museums, "Museums for a New Century" (1984).

It is necessary to deal with each of these concerns briefly. First, however, it is appropriate to summarise comments about this aspect of Te Papa's performance.

Customer Focus

The last few decades have seen a fairly radical shift in the focus of museums, to the point where the visitor experience includes not only the objects and their interpretation but all interactions encompassed through the visit. This applies from the time of first encountering information about the museum until after the visit, when the visit and the experience are recalled and discussed and the recollections elaborated and acted on, or not.⁹

The expectations generated by advertising, promotion or information passed on by word-of-mouth, all contribute to the visitor's expectation of the museum experience. This is no less true of the greeting at the museum, the nature of the building, the friendliness or otherwise of the staff, the cleanliness of the food services and restrooms and the ease of finding one's way around. All of these elements have come to be recognised as important parts of the visitor experience, in addition to the displays and the objects in them and their interpretation. It thus includes the total marketing experience in the proper sense of that word.

Audience Research & Learning

Audience research is now very extensive and encompasses not only demographics but also psychographics and assessments of various elements of learning in the museum, including the ability to recall various facts and the attitude to the visit. Studies by leaders in the learning field, in particular recently, have illuminated the nature of the learning experience. Whilst measuring learning may be difficult and the definition of learning a point of argument, elements common to all studies involve the ability to place the information gained in the context of knowledge and understanding that the visitor already has prior to their visit. Added to this is the visitor's ability to determine for himself or herself, or at least participate in the determination of what it is they do during the visit and how they behave. Mere

⁹Falk, John H. and Dierking, Lynn, *The Museum Experience*. Washington, DC: Whalesback Books, 1992, Falk, John H. and Dierking, Lynn, School Field trips: Assessing their long-term impact. *Curator* 40/3: 211-218, 1997.

contemplation of the way in which one connects with art may be an important outcome of a visit and lead to different ways of interacting with art presentations subsequently¹⁰.

What is clear is that when asked the general visitor expresses dissatisfaction with the traditional approach to displays of objects in a museum. Many young people, in particular express dissatisfaction. This may be influenced by the nature of the visit in school groups, which tends to provide little opportunity for the child to determine what they will see and do and little context in terms of curriculum or anything else.

Research on art displays and on interpretation at the Cleveland Art Institute¹¹ and the Denver Art Museum,¹² for instance, revealed:

- Visitors want their learning experiences to be directly related to the objects they see as they tend to learn in short bursts. Different visitors have different reactions to interpretive devices so a variety of them should be provided and museums should send a clear hospitable message to visitors.
- Successful interpretation for novices means “accepting where they are” – keeping their backgrounds, preconceptions and values in mind and, most importantly, taking the position that their experiences are not to be downplayed or negated but built on and broadened.
- Labels should be written for the primary audience in a lucid simple manner with strong verbs, relate directly to and enhance the work of art, and technical terms should be defined.

Recent publications have summarised the museum as a place for learning¹³ and explored the museum visit as a memorable one. This view of learning and the research upon it reveals a radically different approach from the traditional perception of what was effective learning by the novice in museums and other informal settings. Rather than the wants of the visitor to the museum (in terms of effective learning or education) being ‘known’, through the knowledge or content expert (curator) as authority, research is conducted on what it is the visitor wants to know and then how they react to it. Front-end (questioning attitudes and expectations), formative (which envisages modification to previously implemented strategies) and summative evaluation (testing) is important, even critical.

¹⁰Anna M. Kindler, *Aesthetic Development and Learning in Art Museums: a Challenge to Enjoy*, *Journal of Museum Education* 22 (2 & 3), 12-16 (1997)

¹¹John E. Schloder and others, *The Visitors Voice ...*, Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art (1994)

¹²Steve Grinstead & Margaret Ritchie (editors), *The Denver Art Museum Interpretive Project*, Denver: Denver Art Museum (1990)

¹³George Hein and Mary Alexander, *Museums: Places of Learning*. Washington DC: American Association of Museums (1998)

Attention to customer focus by museums has led to new kinds of people gaining influence and shifts in power inside and outside the museum. This has not always been welcomed and sometimes has been resisted. It has caused more ructions in museums with a tradition of scholarship and large collections but has been adapted with little concern by new science centres. The scholarly research in the field has been conducted by academics in universities but the results have not always become part of the basis for action by museums and scholars in the disciplines with which the museum is concerned.

Changes in the exhibitions at The Natural History Museum (London), the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Canadian Museum of Nature (Ottawa), amongst others, have generated accusations of “dumbing-down” and “Disneyfication”. In particular when The Natural History Museum displayed diagrams showing evolutionary pathways as revealed by the process known as cladistics, objections were raised that the museum was forcing its views (“Marxist dogma”) down people’s throats. Once upon a time, it was said, people were allowed to make up their own mind in museums! At Paris’ National Museum of Natural History a recently completed major exhibition on evolution was developed in such a way that museum scientists wrote to the President of France to complain. Nonetheless, the exhibition from its opening was near universally applauded as one of the most outstanding exhibitions on the subject at any museum in the world.

The experience of visiting a theme park, differences between theme parks and outdoor history parks, like Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation in the USA and Sovereign Hill in Australia, are generally not explored in such criticisms. This inherently suggests that if people are enjoying themselves in a context of little information then they are not engaged in [serious] learning. A contrast is also made between learning and education on the one hand and fun and entertainment on the other. This is especially so in the case of school groups whose visit is seldom planned by the children and which are judged as successful by marking answers to questions on a ‘work sheet’. [In another context one might ask whether attending a performance of Shakespeare’s Henry IV Part I or Julius Caesar is a learning experience to any significant respect, or simply entertainment.]

Successful museums take all of this into account as well as ensuring that exhibits that are open work and those that don’t are fixed quickly¹⁴ They also ensure that their marketing is properly funded and that the people working on exhibition teams understand the basis of exhibition development. They focus strategically on the visitor.

These issues and developments have to be kept in mind in considering the commentary on Te Papa. It is fair to say that a number of criticisms are from people who do not have an

¹⁴Griffin, Des; Abraham, Morrie; and Crawford, John, Effective management of museums in the 1990s. *Curator* 42/1, 37-53, 1999.

understanding of these matters or of the research and considerations given to them by Te Papa staff. The prominence given such views by the media is unfortunate in this context. Where people speak for others like themselves, where scholars identify their expectations and wants, they are acting appropriately. But where assertions are made about how people learn in ignorance of recent research, then one should listen to the research.

The Situation at Te Papa

Early on (in 1994) Te Papa established a unit of three people to develop knowledge and understanding of the visitor, their demographics, psychographics and museum visiting experience. Research was conducted on visitors to the previous complex in Buckle Street at the National Museum and the National Art Gallery. Information from previous research throughout the world on visitors to museums and the research on their experiences was collated. Front-end evaluations of exhibition concepts were conducted. A unit of three people is relatively large. (By way of contrast, not all museums have audience evaluation staff and not all use visitor research in planning their exhibitions and public programmes.)

Exhibition development at Te Papa takes account of audience evaluation and visitor research. The teams developing the exhibitions include writers and designers. Curators or knowledge 'experts' may supply text and other interpretation but the writers and designers translate that to the exhibition.

The questions for serious consideration are the extent to which the translation of the visitor response is successfully realised in the exhibitions and the extent to which the audience focus has been too narrow and excluded one or more groups to the detriment of others. As well there is a question as to whether the criticism by people outside the Museum, in the media and elsewhere, comprehends what we know of effective learning, and the extent to which implementation of this has been attempted by Te Papa. As already been mentioned, a number of critics do not know anything of this and base their commentary on their own experience and often detailed rather than general knowledge of certain aspects of scholarship and collections.

Te Papa has been visited by huge numbers of people, many residents of New Zealand having visited many times over the last two years. Te Papa has conducted surveys of attitudes to the Museum and to the visiting experience: the results say there is a very high level of satisfaction, 93%, and a high level of support for Te Papa. A recent survey gives important information on this and reveals, amongst other things, that Te Papa has been visited by 35% of New Zealand residents.

Interviewees generally described "dumbing-down" as underestimating the imagination and intelligence of the visitors by simple and "unchallenging" or over-explained labels. Such

people often expressed the view that children could be left to draw their own conclusions and did not need such simple language as was used in the labels, that art speaks for itself (a view not now shared by most art museum curators or directors), and so on. There was also a frequent statement that more items of a similar nature should be shown, ie more artefacts of a similar kind, more animals of related species, etc. This is valid for scholars and those very familiar with particular fields of knowledge as opposed to the general visitor.

The availability of information, beyond that immediately accessible in the displays, was also raised as a concern. Such information is available and is being added to. The Resource Centres provide such information through Te Papa OnScreen, which can lead the visitor to popular publications or to the floor staff who can, in turn, contact the library, curatorial staff or research publications. Resource Centre Hosts can also find out about the people currently undertaking research on a particular subject outside the Museum.

As mentioned elsewhere in the report, a number of interviewees expressed concern about the resources such as Te Papa OnScreen being available only in Resource Centres that are seen as designed primarily for children. Te Papa senior management is aware of this preference, acknowledges it as valid and is planning to bring computer screens on to the main floor of exhibitions.

Education Programmes and Programmes for School Groups

Education and interpretation in Te Papa makes use of the visitor studies commenced in 1994 with evaluations of the visitor experience at the Buckle Street galleries. This led to decisions to attend to differences in learning styles across the range of audiences, to address the way the audience responded to exhibitions, and to provide layers of information so that visitors could pick and choose and determine a house-style for text labels and interpretation. "The notion of multiple voices in exhibitions is central," said one staff member in discussions. Development of exhibitions has gone through levels of examination and approval particularly focusing on the beginning, middle and end. Audience evaluation also led to deliberate decisions to meet and greet visitors and develop the Hosts programme.

Like all museums Te Papa has an active programme catering for visits by school groups; these include visits that Te Papa itself manages and those where schools simply visit without making any specific arrangements with the Museum. Te Papa provides 38 programmes in five themes for school groups, which include strong curriculum links. The programmes are provided under the banner of "Leisure, Pleasure, Learning". School visits are dealt with and planned with the school by Leisure, Pleasure Learning Co-ordinators and a charge of \$4.50 per child is made. Involvement of Te Papa programmes rather than self-managed visits by school groups are encouraged. Te Papa programmes do not use worksheets.

General Conclusions and Recommendations

Our view is that:

- The audience evaluation and knowledge of learning theory and practice, as well as knowledge of museum audiences (specifically the potential and actual audience for Te Papa) held by the staff responsible for these areas is substantial.
- The appreciation of the relevance of this knowledge and its application in marketing, visitor relations and exhibition interpretation is very appropriate, notwithstanding that it is, in some cases, variable. Moreover, senior management is aware of concerns by certain parts of their existing and potential audience, acknowledges the validity of much of that, and is planning to address these through consideration of important changes to some exhibitions.
- The way in which audience evaluation information has been used in education programmes is very commendable and the fact that worksheets are not used is to be celebrated!

It is also our view that although there are some areas for improvement, of which Te Papa staff and senior management are aware, in general the knowledge and application of it compares more than favourably with the very best of museum practice worldwide. We say this with knowledge of numerous museums and similar organisations in the UK, Canada, the USA and Australia as well as New Zealand.

Recommendations arising from consideration of these matters are taken up in other chapters of this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank all those who gave up their time to talk with us during this review.

We thank the CEO, senior management and staff of Te Papa for their hospitality during the two weeks of interviews and discussions at the Museum.

We also thank the senior staff of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, especially Mr Martin Matthews and Ms Jane Kominik, for their hospitality during the visit to Wellington in May and their support during the conduct of this review.

Appendix 1: *List of documents consulted.*

Folder 1 'Selection of documents relating to the development of Te Papa

May 1985	Cabinet Minute – Development Team approval
Nov. 1985	Nga Taonga o Te Motu: Treasures of the Nation
April 1987	Cabinet Minute
April 1989/Dec.1991	Concept Statement
Jan.1990	Cabinet Minute Concept, planning phase
May 1991	Memo for Cabinet, Recommendation for project assessment
May 1992	Cabinet Minutes (X2) Construction/Funding
July 1992	Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act
July 1993	1993/94 Corporate Plan
March 1994	International Peer Review report
July 1994	Board Report, Day One Exhibition approval
May 1994	Bicultural Policy
Nov 1994	Report to Government Review of Operating Funding
Dec.1994	Cabinet Minute Endorsing Optimum experience
March 1995	Report for Government Review of Operating Expenditure
Dec.1995	Cabinet Minute Bridging Finance
April 1999	Report for Government Review of Operating Funding
Dec.1999	Briefing for Prime Minister, Conceptual Framework

Folder 2 Visitor and Market Research Bibliography

Sept.1994	Front end evaluation Art One (<i>Parade</i>)
April 1996	Te Marae o Te Papa Tongarewa evaluation report What pre-schools and schools want from Te Papa Our Place Education Programmes?
1996-97	Meta-evaluation of computer role-play interactives: Overall findings...

Jan.1998	A summary of comments from visitors at the December 'soft openings'
Aug.1999	<i>Goldie</i> – Exhibition Summary Report
Aug.1999	<i>Star Trek: The Exhibit</i> - Exhibition Summary Report
May 1998	Customer Satisfaction- Findings from quantitative research...
Feb.-Sept.1998	Visitor Profile
Oct-Dec.1999	Quarterly Visitor Profile

Folder 3 Press clippings

Extensive press clippings from Nov.1997 to April 2000

Other documents

March 1992	Report to Minister of Cultural Affairs
Aug.1994	A strategy for scholarship and research
Feb.1996	Speaking with Authority
1998	Implementation of strategies for scholarship and Matauranga Maori in museums
1998/99	Annual Report
July 1999	Reach further independent review of business plans & budgets (2000-2003)
Oct.1999	Corporate Governance at Te Papa
Oct.1999	The Board's strategy for the display of the visual arts at Te Papa
1999	Statement of Intent 1999/2000, 2000/2001, 2001/2002
1999-2000	Purchase Agreement
Sept.1999	Core projects Matrix and criteria for reviewing sub-projects
Feb.2000	A summary report. UMR Insight Ltd.

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

The Review Team met with the following Te Papa Board members and staff in group briefings on a Strategic Overview and the Future, Concept and Vision, Audience and Market Research, Collections Loan Programme, Scholarship and Matauranga, and Te Papa's approach to Learning and Education.

Board Members:

Sir Ronald Trotter (Chair)
Sue Wood

Staff of the Museum:

Dame Cheryl Sotheran, Chief Executive

James Te Puni, Acting Kaihautu
Dr Cliff Whiting ONZ (former Kaihautu and Concept Leader Maori)
Murray Stevens, General Manager, Museum Resources
Paul McAleer, Manager, Curatorial Services
Dr Patrick Brownsey, Curator Botany (also Manager, Collection Development)
Ian Wedde, Concept Leader, Humanities
Bronwyn Labrum, Curator History
Jillian Lloyd, Curator Art
John Walsh, Curator Art
Sean Mallon, Curator History (Pacific)
Dr Janet Davidson, Curator Pacific
Dr Wendy Nelson, Curator Botany
Awhina Tamarapa-Parata, Curator Maori
Ric Odom, Manager, Collections Services
Jo Torr, Manager, Collections Loans
Pat Stuart, General Manager, Strategic Planning
Matthew Reid, Financial Controller
Paul Brewer, General Manager, Communications and Marketing
Christine Fitzgerald, Manager, Visitor and Market Research
Raewyn Smith-Kapa, Acting General Manager, Research and Development
Neil Anderson, Manager, Te Papa Productions
Desmond Brice, Concept Developer
Arapata Hakiwai, Manager, Bicultural Operations

The Review Team met with the following persons in person or interviewed them by telephone.

Gretchen Albrecht, Artist
Roger Blackley, Victoria University of Wellington, Art Historian
Dr Bob Brockie, Victoria University of Wellington (former Concept Leader, "Biotic Realm", Te Papa)
Dr Denis Dutton, Department of Philosophy, University of Canterbury
Professor Philip Garnock-Jones, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington
Dr George Gibbs, former Associate Professor, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington
Warner Haldane, Director, Whakatane District Museum and Art Gallery
Dr Geoff Hicks, Ministry for the Environment (former Concept Leader Natural History Te Papa)
Alexa Johnston, Consultant Art Historian
Dr Bob McDowell, Senior Scientist, NIWA, Christchurch
Peter McLeavey, Art dealer, Wellington
Darcy Nicholas, Artist and Art Educator
Dr Margaret Orbell, Anthropologist
Dr Jock Phillips, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, Historian (former Concept Leader, History, Te Papa)
Dr Francis Pound, University of Auckland, Art Historian

Lisa Reihana, Artist

Dr Mere Roberts, University of Auckland, Biologist

Rev. Lergi Sapelli, Pacific Islands community, Wellington

Professor Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Maori Department, Victoria University of Wellington, Art Historian

Michael Tuffrey, Artist

Dr Ranginui Walker, former Professor of Maori Studies, University of Auckland

Prof. Albert Wendt, University of Auckland, Writer

David Wooding, Director Southland Museum and Art Gallery, Invercargill

Anthony Wright, Director, Canterbury Museum & Chair, Museums Aotearoa

Written responses were received from: -

Prof. Philip Garnock-Jones, Darcy Nicholas, Prof. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Dr Bob Brockie,
Mr Vince Terrini (Art Gallery of New Zealand Society Inc)