

# Specialist Support Scheme – Engagement Report

## Hull and East Riding Museum

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Islamic Art and Material Culture



Birmingham  
Museums



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## **Contents**

### **1) Introduction**

### **2) Short-term**

- i) Temporary display
- ii) Tell the World
- iii) Blogging
- iv) Public talk(s)
- v) Families

### **3) Mid-term**

- i) Engaging Hull's Iranian community

### **4) Long-term**

- i) 12-15 month period of community engagement leading to a community created and curated temporary exhibition – including the IAMC collection and community responses

### **5) Conclusion**

## **Introduction**

This report aims to identify possible audiences that Hull and East Riding Museum can engage using its Islamic Art and Material Culture (IAMC) collections. It is not a comprehensive report focusing on all audiences. The report focuses on ideas and suggestions that are realistic, deliverable, and sustainable. The author of the report visited the museum in early March 2017 and met with the Curator and Assistant Curator of Designated Collections.

The museum has recently submitted a major ACE funding application and is currently waiting to hear the outcome. The museum stressed that a great deal depends on the outcome of the funding application in terms of what could be delivered with their IAMC collection. I have taken this into consideration when writing this report. It is divided into three sections, basic engagement that can be delivered in the short-term, engagement that could be delivered in the mid-term with a bit more time and resource, and then finally a more ambitious long term proposal for engaging audiences.

## **Short-term**

### Temporary display

As part of the Specialist Support Scheme, the museum is keen to create a temporary exhibit of a selection of their IAMC collection. Two helmets from the IAMC collection will be displayed later in 2017, with the possibility that a selection of the IAMC ceramics may also be displayed. As part of the support scheme, display stands have been purchased to enable the helmets to be exhibited. The temporary display will be added to the galleries as part of an event called Tell The World.

It would be great if the museum could make the display as interactive as possible. A basket/box consisting of replica material, information for families and dressing-up costume would work well in conjunction with the display. It would be fantastic to have a replica helmet, or at least part of one. This would enable visitors to experience the helmet through tactile engagement. This type of engagement could encourage the following questions: What does the metal and helmet detail feel like? How heavy is the helmet? What does the inside of the helmet feel like? If I use a magnifying glass to look closely at the helmet what can I see? What do the images mean? Who might have worn the helmet? Family friendly information about how the helmet would have been worn, what other armour may have been worn with it, who might have made it, how long it would have taken to make, where was it made, etc would really enhance the display and could be presented via information cards in the basket/box. A short family friendly leaflet could be made to support the display. This could include the following: fun facts, multiple choice questions, a space to draw the

helmet or a detail from the helmet, a word search of words associated with the helmet, or possibly a space to design your own helmet.



Helmets from the collection

### Tell the World – skills sharing event

As part of the Tell the World event, the museum will host an event for local and regional museum professionals. This will provide an opportunity for the museum to update fellow professionals on the results of the Specialist Support Scheme, including enhanced documentation, how the collection fits into the wider narrative of Islamic art and material culture, and the stories that can be told using the objects. In addition to showcasing the collections element of the Specialist Support Scheme the museum could also share the learning and engagement element of the work. Hosting an event and inviting both collections and learning/engagement professionals will provide a great opportunity for some wonderful collaborative thinking and discussion based on the collection.

### Blogging

An effective way to engage audiences with the IAMC collection is through a series of short blogs. These could be posted at regular intervals and provide updates on the latest work linked to the collection. They could focus on the support offered by the SSN, be a general update, or perhaps focus on individual objects within the collection. The museum could also share any engagement work that is being planned or that has been delivered.

### Public talk(s)

A further strand to the Tell the World event could be to organise a public talk to highlight the recent work and to share the IAMC objects with as wide an audience as possible. Collections specialist, Melanie Gibson, could be invited back to the museum to lead this talk.

### Families

The IAMC collection lends itself to family themed activities including clay crafts, calligraphy, pattern, symmetry, and colour. Families could have a go at creating their own paper/card helmet, an air-drying clay bowl or pot, or perhaps experiment with calligraphy. A short family focused gallery tour could be designed for when the helmets are on temporary display. In addition to basic, but engaging, information, a simple gallery game or activity could be introduced. These would be led by the Families Officer or family friendly trained volunteers. If the museum can purchase replica objects, these could also be used to engage families.

(See also ideas suggested in the 'Temporary Display' section).

### **Mid-term**

#### Engaging Hull's Iranian community

In the original Specialist Support Scheme application, the museum stated 'that through gaining a better understanding of the IAMC collections, it will be possible to develop effective and sustainable engagement opportunities for specific communities.' On her visit in March 2017, the Collections Specialist identified ceramics made in Nishapu and Kashan, Iran. As Hull has a significant Iranian community the museum should utilise this collection to develop a relationship with this audience.

#### Ceramics from Nishapu, Iran



#### Ceramics from Kashan, Iran



The Iranian Community of Hull (ICOH) was formed in 2013 aimed at improving the lives of Iranian people and communities in the local area. ICOH acts as a hub for Iranian cultural and social activity within the city, working to disseminate information on Iranian culture and art. The community runs workshops for young people, organises social and cultural events and supports parents to integrate their children into British culture while retaining Iranian identity.

The ICOH can be contacted via their website [www.icoh.org.uk](http://www.icoh.org.uk) or Facebook [www.facebook.com/Iranian-Community-of-Hull-ICOH](https://www.facebook.com/Iranian-Community-of-Hull-ICOH)

The museum could contact ICOH to let them know about the Iranian ceramics and to invite the group to the museum to view the collection. Explain that the museum would be really interested in developing a relationship with ICOH and would be keen to hear how the

community would like to engage with the collection and whether they have ideas that could bring the collection to the attention of a wider audience. The museum could also share ideas they have for the Iranian ceramics.

An initial visit to the museum could include both curatorial and learning members of staff. A selection of the ceramics could be brought out of the stores for the group to view. Information on the ceramics, as provided by the collections specialist via the Specialist Support Scheme, could be shared with the group, as well as the group being invited to share any knowledge they may have linked to the objects and/or the areas of Iran that the ceramics were made.

Possible activities/projects/events that could be developed, should the group be interested, could include:

- A series of short films about objects within the collection or a series of narrated images. These could be hosted online.
- A small temporary exhibition of the Iranian ceramics. The objects could be selected by individuals within the group and in addition to historical information, the interpretation could focus on the reasons why each object was selected for display, e.g personal responses.
- Plan an 'Open Day' based on the IAMC collection. Working with members of staff, the group could showcase the collection to general visitors. They could share information about the objects, and ask members of the public for their feedback and thoughts. This information could then be used by the museum when planning further use of the IAMC collection.
- Work with the Learning team on activity ideas for families linked to the open day. This could include a simple clay pot activity, calligraphy, etc
- A series of short films celebrating the Iranian objects in the collection, combined with a celebration of Iranian culture and community in Hull today.

### **Long-term**

A long-term aim for the museum could be to use the IAMC collection as a focus for a community co-created and co-curated exhibition. This would provide an opportunity to engage a range of audiences (existing and new) over a 12-15 month period, create opportunities for volunteers, and encourage participants to develop new skills.

The museum has a temporary exhibition space within the Street Life Museum that could be used to showcase a selection of the IAMC collection and the work generated through a community project. The museum could seek funding opportunities to help deliver a project with ambition such as this.

Month 1-12 Recruit a small team of community curators. You may want to offer this opportunity to your existing volunteers first. This is a nice way to acknowledge their commitment to the museum and a great way to develop their skills. You may also want to provide opportunities to new volunteers, especially those from the local Iranian community. The community curators would be responsible for researching the collection, writing and editing exhibition text, selecting objects and images, coordinating the work generated by community groups, working on the design of the exhibition panels and labels, installation of the exhibition, and planning an exhibition launch.

The group could meet on a weekly basis throughout the duration of the project.

Members of staff would need to train/equip the group with the basic skills to deliver this work and support them throughout.

Month 1 Research groups that the museum would like to work with, or if the museum has priority audiences to target then focus on these. A good place to start could be local Hull Ward Teams. Details can be found via the following weblink:

[http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/portal/page-\\_pageid=221,197113&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/portal/page-_pageid=221,197113&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

It may also be worth reading and referring to Hull City Council's Diversity Statement:

[http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/portal/page-\\_pageid=221,81480&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/portal/page-_pageid=221,81480&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Month 1-2 Museum staff/Learning Team to contact local schools, community groups, ESOL providers, etc to explore possible opportunities for project work. Create a project plan based around the groups that respond positively to working with the museum.

Month 2-3 Outreach Officer to deliver a 4-6 week project with a local ESOL group, preferably including Muslim participants.

Month 3-10 Delivery of community projects (Learning Team) – (possibly 3 separate projects).

- An Art & Design focused project could be delivered with teenagers/young adults, exploring shape, pattern, colour, and symmetry, through any of the following media; graffiti, painting, textiles, and film. The museum could contact local providers running A&D courses and ask if they or their students

would be interested in producing work influenced by the museums IAMC collection.

Hull College <http://www.hull-college.ac.uk/courses/further-education/art-design>

- Ceramics project with adults - A short ceramics course could be offered over a period of 4-6 weeks, influenced by the Iranian ceramics in the collection. This could be delivered by a ceramics specialist. The museum may wish to charge a course fee to cover costs.
- Film project - The museum could create a series of short films (maximum of 10) focusing on different elements of the IAMC collection. These could be 30-40 seconds long and could include responses from a range of people, including museum staff, volunteers, students, and a selection of community participants, including adults, young people, and school children. The films could include historical facts and visual descriptions, or perhaps be more personal responses. Local people could be given a selection of IAMC objects from the collection and asked to choose their favourite. They could then be filmed talking about why they chose it and what they like about it.

Month 6-10 Work with the local Iranian community (ICOH) to select objects from the ceramics collection to be included in the exhibition. Research and write text panels and labels for the exhibition.

Month 10-11 Community Curators plan the exhibition launch

Month 12 Install and launch the exhibition

Month 12 Learning Team to create a short family trail for the exhibition

Month 12 -15 Series of events linked to the exhibition – family activities, public talks, etc

Month 13 Museum staff to host a celebration party for all those involved in the exhibition

Month 15 Exhibition take down

Post exhibition Evaluate the whole community curated exhibition. What worked well, and not so well. Consult all the groups involved to explore the possibility of developing relationships further. Would the community curators like to work on further projects? Would they like to share their skills with new members of the group, etc?

## **Conclusion**

This report aimed to highlight possible audiences that could engage with the IAMC collection at Hull and East Riding Museum. The report did not aim to cover all audiences or all possibilities, rather it aimed to highlight a selection. Much will depend on future priorities, staff time and budgets.

As a result of the Specialist Support Scheme from the SSN for Islamic Art and Material Culture it is hoped that the staff at the museum have an increased confidence to both explore the potential display of their IAMC collection through permanent or temporary exhibitions and to use them to engage a range of audiences from the local community.