

Councillors' Information Bulletin: 7 April 2025

Title of Update: RAMM Highlights Report 2024-25 (Q4)

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1. What is the update about?

This is the quarterly highlights report for the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, showing museum activity for the period January to March 2025.

2. Background

The quarterly highlights report, along with other reports showing activity against targets, is taken to RAMM's Oversight Panel and reported to Arts Council England as part of its National Portfolio Organisation funding agreement. The oversight panel consists of six councillors and two external representatives.

3. Current position

Activity plan

Visitor Experience (Activity 1)

- All-RAMM relaxed sessions started; these were limited in number and though we saw a small uptake in these pilot sessions, the feedback was very positive. Running both a morning and afternoon session, proved popular with those who attended. RAMM intends to run more all-museum relaxed sessions in future.
- The RAMM cafe reopened in the February school half term holidays. It is operating on limited opening hours to begin with. We have seen dwell times of visitors increase anecdotally across both the cafe space and the museum as a whole. The offer is reasonably varied and has received positive feedback from RAMM people and visitors alike.

- RAMM shortlisted for Museums + Heritage Accessibility Award. Entry is based on RAMM's cross-teams Accessibility Champions group, which is guiding institutional transformation. RAMM's inclusivity ethos seeks to ensure access to overcome obstacles ranging from mobility and physical disabilities to neurodiversity and anxiety.

Exhibitions and Events (Activity 2)

- 'Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape' closed on 23 February. The exhibition received high levels of positive visitor feedback and ticket sales were high (6619). The exhibition was the focus for a I&I report and a full internal debrief was carried out on 1 April.
- RAMM's major new exhibition opened on 22 March. 'FOOD: beyond the plate' delves into the stories behind food by drawing on the museum's wide-ranging collections to explore the sometimes-controversial histories of hunting, fishing, farming and international trade.
- Two co-curated displays opened in January. In Viewpoint, 'Devon in the 1920s' shows costume and ephemera from the decade, chosen and interpreted by RAMM's Future Skills participants. The 'What Do You Collect?' case features Mingei pottery selected by its owner for display at RAMM.
- February Half Term saw 160 children taking part in World Cultures mask making. A further 100 children made rainsticks on the Wednesday. On the Thursday, 283 children and their families embarked on a time travelling adventure with Tilka, the prehistoric puppet. Guided by performers from MED Theatre, Tilka led the audience on a wondrous adventure thousands of years into the past, then jumped 200 years into our future, to see how in very little time, the wind-swept moor may become a dry wasteland, taken over by industrialised farming and ravaged by climate change.
- RAMM ran a creative activity throughout the month of February for LGBTQ+ month. Local artist Scotty Gillespie created an engaging activity that invited people of all ages to explore the museum's remarkable collections and discover connections to their own identity. Through this fun activity book, they had the opportunity to create their own unique character, drawing inspiration from the treasures found within the museum.
- Artist Garry Fabien-Miller hosted an in-conversation lunchtime event for 30 people talking about his work which featured in the Dartmoor exhibition. This talk was filmed and offered on sale for those that couldn't attend to watch the event afterwards.
- An adults-only Playtime Revival event in March welcomed 100 adults to engage in play – taking them back to their childhoods – with circus skills, hula hooping, a bouncy castle, mask making and more. This attracted a younger audience than usual.

Digital (Activity 3)

- Availability of RAMM's Bloomberg Connects content was announced publicly on the 21 January. In Q4 there have been 256 guide starts from 176 different users. This works out as an average of 2.5 users per day and 3.7 guide starts per day. The guide has also been read in 6 different languages, including Chinese and Catalan.
- RAMM continues to develop its online sales offer. Digital Passes have been added to Spektrix so people can use their Apple Wallet or Google Wallet to store tickets. This is more convenient for visitors.
- For the Dartmoor exhibition RAMM experimented with the use of a QR code for ticket sales. At the moment we have insufficient data to contextualise its effectiveness but we consider it worth continuing in future paid-for exhibitions.

Contemporary Art (Activity 4)

- The new acquisitions by Céline Condorelli continued to be shown through Q4. Condorelli was the National Gallery's Artist-in-Residence in 2023, a partnership between the National Gallery and RAMM which provided the artist an opportunity to respond to one of the great collections of paintings in the Western European tradition, as well as RAMM's rich collections. RAMM subsequently acquired two works courtesy of the Contemporary Art Society.
- RAMM's commissions by artist Alex Hartley and filmmaker Ashish Ghadiali inspired by RAMM's collections were shown through Q4 in the exhibition Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape.
- RAMM is working with artists Charmaine Watkiss and Sarah Gillespie to deliver the 2025-26 commissions and has launched two new opportunities for the following year for an exhibition on fungi.

Children and Young people (Activity 5)

- The pilot World Cultures schools project saw 160 KS2 school children from two primary schools visit RAMM in January for an activity day to learn about mask making cultures around the world. Both are in rural locations where under half of pupils had not had the opportunity to visit a museum before and may have limited access to arts and culture outside of school. Ruth Webb, a local designer-maker specialising in costume and prop-making, was commissioned to design and lead four days of mask making workshops in their school settings, inspired by RAMM's World Cultures collections. RAMM also piloted a new world cultures themed object handling activity called 'Around the world in 9 objects' to introduce pupils to different cultures and ways of living through nine mystery objects.
- RAMM's home education programme continues to be popular. Workshops on spoon carving, metal casting, Romans in Devon, Ancient Egypt and World War 2 attracted families from all over Devon from ages 4 to 16.
- Exeter College tutors brought students to visit the Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape exhibition to inspire creative work as part of their coursework. This year's second

year A level videography students produced a short film reel inspired by the exhibition that was projected in the museum courtyard for two weeks in January.

Individual Creativity (Activity 6)

- The Museum Meet-Up wellbeing activity for over 50s provided a relaxed tour of the Dartmoor exhibition, an opportunity to try stop-motion animation related to archaeology, and a curator-conservator tour of new food exhibition Beyond the Plate. The monthly group now consistently attracts 12-20 people per session and has become a welcoming cultural space for adults overcoming anxiety, depression and isolation.
- RAMM responded to visit requests from Groundwork SouthWest to bring two groups of asylum-seekers into the museum. The group experienced bonding across languages and an enjoyable day out.
- RAMM's dementia-friendly programme visited Franklyn Hospital older people's mental health wards and the museum delivered age-friendly sessions for Shilhay older people in ECC social housing.

Skills Development (Activity 7)

- The Future Skills programme is working with 17 young people over 12 sessions throughout the year. We deliver sessions that give a rounded picture of how a museum operates from a range of different departments and experts.
- The Future Skills team are currently working on 2 sessions delivered by Francesca Farmer who is working directly on the GLAM E-Lab project. The first session was on copyright, clearing copyright, open access, image and metadata management. She showed the cohort how to clear copyright in practice in the session. The second session will be focused on uploading works to Wikipedia and editing Wikipedia articles. The sessions are based on a toolkit developed by Francesca and colleagues at the University of Exeter to show the work they are doing on building open access program within the museum, library, and archive sector.

Dynamic Collections (Activity 8)

- Work is ongoing on South West Collections Explorer (SWCE) website. The site is undergoing a re-build with fresh interpretation using the new opportunities offered by the Museum Data Service. This work is part of the essential changes needed to the documentation infrastructure prior to the creation of a Digital Asset Management System (DAMS).
- Participants from Hikmat attended a celebration event to mark the end of the first community project and to collect the artwork that they had made. We received excellent feedback from them about their positive experience of the project.
- The outputs from the first community project have been compiled and are presented on a collections story project page. This includes information about the project,

photos, 3D scans of artwork, quotes from participants, blog posts from project interns.

- A panel about the project is on display as part of the Food: Beyond the Plate exhibition
- Simon Lee Dicker's artwork from the project is on display in the Food: Beyond the Plate exhibition.
- All creative outputs and comments from the first community project have been logged as digital assets ready to populate new DAMS.

Community engagement and university collaboration (Creative Arc) (Activity 9)

- The Tastes Like Home project on the theme of food concluded. Over the project, RAMM held craft activity and a pop-up exhibition of community objects in St Thomas Library, provided Instagram training for social conscious foodies, connected with community partner LOVE Food CIC. There was a celebratory visit to RAMM from participants with heritage in many parts of the world, St Thomas neighbourhood families, and older people from ECC housing in Grandisson Court, Countess Wear (who brought their own kitchen objects to share).
- A new exhibition by local artist Hannah Mumby opened in the café. It incorporates dozens of conversations with Exeter residents – from Afghanistan and Cornwall to Egypt, Hong Kong, Italy and Lithuania – into a series of wall panels that explore memories and customs around food. Every object comes from a quote, and words waft around it like smells and sounds of cooking.
- Collaboration with Exeter University on Food has resulted in a digital map of food action and research around the city, available in the exhibition, uplifting for local pride and optimism about future sustainability.

Investment principles plan

Ambition & Quality

- RAMM's Data and Insight Officer has spent time with teams from The Box and Libraries Unlimited to share knowledge about dashboard reporting and using the Impact & Insight (I&I) evaluation toolkit.
- The I&I report on Dartmoor: A Radical Landscape showed that the creative intentions were resoundingly achieved with scores for all six dimensions selected between 76 and 85. This was based on 95 public responses, the largest number used for sampling on a RAMM exhibition so far, meaning a low margin of error (4%). Local Impact was the highest scoring dimension (85). 79% of those surveyed reported making a special trip to RAMM to visit the exhibition.
- RAMM's programming themes and their possible revision was the subject of all-staff workshops on 19 and 26 March. Originally planned to feed into the 2027-30 NPO application, the results will now be adopted to shape RAMM content from 2026-27 onwards.

Inclusivity & Relevance

- Training on inclusive recruitment was carried out for RAMM managers and also extended to ECC HR team and other managers in the culture and leisure team
- RAMM hosted a visit from the North Devon National Trust team who wanted to learn about the museum's accessibility and engagement ethos and practice.

Environmental Responsibility

- Progress on programming RAMM's Building Management System (BMS) has continued in earnest, resulting in the Air Handling Units (AHUs) running at a much-reduced rate to achieve the same required environmental conditions. Of note is reduction in operation of the AHU Chiller unit, previously running at 10-30KW per hour 24/7 – this now operates at no more than 7KW per hour and only at times when required. Operation times have been cut in half to further accrue savings and slash energy consumption.
- RAMM has continued to rollout replacement of all halogen bulbs with energy-efficient LEDs; all temporary galleries and most other public & non-public areas have been changed as required. The Courtyard and lift lobby (first floor) have been changed over within this quarter.

Dynamism

- A new income monitoring dashboard has been launched, showing progress against targets for RAMM's commercial income generating activities (shop, venue hire, exhibition and events tickets, schools etc.)
- RAMM advised East Devon County Council on engagement practices to inform their upcoming HLF bid, which will include a community programme inspired by RAMM's Dartmoor Frame of Mind project.
- RAMM presented at the international Museums Health and Wellbeing Summit in January about the Dartmoor Frame of Mind project to 1,200 delegates from 35 different countries. The project profiled on Museum Next's website as a case study.

4. Future position

n/a

5. Are there any other options?

n/a

6. Conclusion

RAMM continues to deliver a varied, inclusive and ambitious programme of activities to its audiences in the city and further afield. It is performing well against its targets and KPIs