

# "This was supposed to be a flying visit, but we've stayed longer"

A study of how current provision meets the needs  
of families with children under 5 at the V & A  
and how it could develop in the future

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## **1 Aim of the report**

This report was commissioned by the V & A Museum to consider to what extent the current provision for families addresses the needs of families with children under 5, whether there is a demand for provision for children under 5 and, if so, what kind of services families with very young children might want the Museum to provide. The Museum is keen to know what the needs, expectations and likely interest of families with very young children are. It is also keen to discover what kind of museum experiences these families have elsewhere and how they would like to see services at the V & A developed for them.

In addition to speaking to families that currently use the Museum, this report aims to provide observational evidence. This will include observation of both current users and in-depth observations of two non-user families. The ideas and information in this report will form the basis for both further research and future development of provision. It is important that development of the service to families both improves what's on offer for current users but also attracts families with young children currently not using the Museum. To this end, the report includes some recommendations and ideas drawn from the consultant's experience of working with families with children under 5.

## **2 Background**

The V & A Museum has a well developed service for families, that is well used by many families who visit regularly as well as by more casual visitors. The Museum offers a set of backpack trails that families may use free of charge. The backpacks are displayed prominently near the Main Entrance, and the back pack stand is staffed by learning team staff, making it user friendly and accessible. Whilst back packs are designed for families with children over 5, the Museum has recently added an under 5s bag that families which include younger children can take in addition to a backpack. These bags include simple activities such as colouring.

In addition to the backpacks, the Museum has a well established Activity Cart. Many families have used this before and return on a regular basis. The Activity Cart is available on weekends and during school holidays. It can be situated in one of five Galleries and offers activities linked to whichever gallery it is in. The activities are mostly art and craft based, although some quizzes are also included. The location of the Activity Cart can be found in the Family leaflet or staff will often advise families.

Special events that happen on a "one off" basis may also be available for families. These are usually "drop in" events, that is they do not require families to arrive at set times or commit to specific lengths of time to be involved. During the period of this study a special event was running that families could take part in. Called "Every Object Tells A Story" the event provided families with a digital camera and challenged them to create a riddle or rhyme using photos of objects taken around the Museum. On return to the event space, families were given the choice of printing their designs onto paper or a free T-shirt. Staff were available to help them.

The Museum currently offers no bespoke provision for children under 5 and their families, apart from the supplementary back pack activities.

### **3 Executive summary**

This report has concluded that families with children under 5 already form part of the existing Museum audience profile. Like other families they come in a wide range of combinations of ages and numbers of adults and children. They predominantly live in Greater London and come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds: much wider than the overall Museum audience profile. They are however, overwhelmingly from social groups 1 to 3, generally experienced museum goers and mostly repeat visitors to the V & A.

The findings show that activities provided by the family learning team both attract family visitors and provide intellectual access for the children. They are well liked by families and form the basis of most families' positive impressions of what the V & A has to offer. Since the activities are not designed for young children however, family adults have to expend a lot of energy helping the children. For those families that explore the Museum beyond the Activity Cart, there is little to support them in engaging their children. They feel unsupported and rely on their museum experience to either lower their expectations or to muddle through. One parent in explaining why they would like some staff led sessions for families said: "It should be half you do it, half the parents. You know more than we do. We're just making it up."

There are access issues for families with young children that the Museum does not currently address. The Museum would need to make significant (but not necessarily costly) improvements before it could consider itself family friendly for families with very young children.

The main recommendations of the report revolve around improving access. Key areas for improvement are in physical access, addressing physical needs, and in intellectual access. The latter should be improved both through the development of permanently available activities for families with younger children and an improvement in the information available to families to enable them to get the most out of the potential the Museum has.

Families with young children already visit the V & A in conjunction with the other South Kensington Museums. There will also be a large pool of families that visit the other museums but may not yet include the V & A in their days out. This is a key area for collaboration between the museums and would offer the V & A a chance to increase its share of this potential audience.

## **4 Key findings**

### **4.1 Do families with children under 5 come to the Museum?**

Families with children under 5 come to the Museum and the majority enjoy the experience. There is a range of size of family group, but the most common group during the sample period was two adults with two children. This grouping enabled many parents to take turns in working with the children and to make quite intensive efforts to ensure their children had access the activities and the collections. Family adults have to work quite hard at the V & A to ensure that children under 5 have an enjoyable and worthwhile

time. This was particularly noticeable on the accompanied visits with inexperienced museum going families and no family activities on offer.

58% of families with more than one child included children over 5, whilst 42% had only younger children. There was slight gender difference with 61% of the children in the families being girls and only 39% boys. 69% of families came from Greater London with a wide diversity of cultural backgrounds represented. Whilst White British was the most common background, it only accounted for 35% of the families interviewed. There was more homogeneity in terms of socio-economic background however with most families recording employment that put them in social groups 1,2 or 3.

Families, come to the V & A for many reasons. Many with older children feel they are really coming for the older child's interest. Many are regular or repeat visitors. 46% of families said they had been to the Museum before, whilst an additional 18% said they had been but not with the children, adding up to a staggering 84% of families being familiar with the Museum. A number of the regular visitors said they came often, with one mother saying "We practically live at the Museum."

These families are experienced museum goers. 84% said they visited other museums and many were able to name other museums and give specific examples of galleries, exhibitions or even exhibits their children enjoyed.

Findings suggest however that families with young children do not see the V & A as a "natural" destination. Some of the families in the sample visited the Museum because the Natural History Museum was late in opening, others used the Science Museum as a safety net and others only meant to drop in for a flying visit, but stayed when they found things to do.

Many families combined visiting the Museum with something else: another museum, the park, going to church. Free entry means that families with young children do not need to commit to a whole day in the Museum to get value for money. This potential to put together day packages where the V & A offers something very different (but equally appropriate) to other venues offers the possibility to attract new family visitors.

#### **4.2 Do families with children under 5 use the current services?**

Families with young children rely upon the activities and events to access the Museum. During the sample period, the majority of families using the Activity Cart included children under 5. When asked about the importance of activities one parent commented: "It determines whether we come."

Although some families with young children do use the Back Packs, they are often advised by staff to try the Activity Cart as it generally has more to offer. Whilst families were very positive about the Activity Cart, the activities were not designed for under 5s and are too difficult for them. Adults have to do much of the activity for the children. As one parent commented: "It's frustrating for them. If it is for them, they should be able to do it." In most cases parents were doing the cutting and making for children, whilst children added decoration. Children were often at a loose end waiting for the cutting to be completed. Parents suggested having pre-cut pieces that children could immediately decorate or more open-ended activities where children could make their own thing, not follow an intricate template, for example using play dough or crayons. The majority of

parents considered that make and take art and craft activities generally were suitable for children under 5 and enjoyed by them.

Whilst parents were often surprised that there were things to do at the Museum, they did point out that these were only available at certain times. Pre-school children in particular can visit during term time in the day, at which point there is nothing specific on offer. Significantly only two families mentioned the hands on opportunities in the British Galleries. Most families do not seem aware of these. Both families on accompanied visits used these areas. Although more could be done to make them appropriate for younger children, they are still a valuable resource, likely to have some appeal to children from 2 -5., and currently under-used.

#### **4.3 How well do the current services meet their needs?**

56% of families gave very positive scores to the family activities and events, i.e. a score of 4 or more out of 5. Most felt that the digital camera event was exciting but a little too difficult for children under 5. Adults would like to see the Activity Cart activities simplified or something different provided for younger children.

Although prepared to suggest improvements, the majority of parents like the Museum and would recommend it to other families with children under 5. 73% of families gave a yes, or qualified yes, when asked if they would recommend it.

The interviews, the accompanied visits and observation demonstrated that the Museum could improve its family friendliness both in terms of things to do and in terms of access and facilities. The Museum appears to present itself as exclusively “for grown ups” (as one parent commented) with families feeling they are not specifically provided for. Whilst the majority of families interviewed were well established museum goers with a clear understanding of how museums work, many still found it difficult to know what was available for them. Staff are having to work hard telling families what is available and family adults are having to work hard helping their children do the activities, lifting them to see the displays and interpreting the displays for them. The accompanied visits highlighted the difficulty with this. Whilst one mother, who had visited a museum before, had just one child and was able to invest the necessary energy into making the visit successful, the other mother, a non-visitor with two children to keep happy, found the whole experience very stressful. Their visit lasted just under one hour and she did not intend to return to the Museum.

Families with young children face many of the access issues that people with disabilities (particularly mobility disabilities) face. They mention many of the same concerns: difficulty finding ramps and lifts, long distances to toilets and doors that open in unhelpful ways. In a potentially confusing building, people with access issues need clear information for navigation. Families find the map to be confusing and unhelpful and a number of families suggested producing a map specifically for them.

Families would like more to do in the Museum. Their suggestions are described in 4.4 below.

#### **4.4 What might families want the Museum to offer?**

Families are clear they want more to do for young children. An overwhelming 89% of families rated the importance of things to do as either 4/5 or 5/5. Whilst craft activities were seen as valuable (93% positive score) families also welcomed suggestions for a wider range of other activities and added their own suggestions.

89% of families gave pretend play a positive score, with handling objects receiving positive scores from 78%. The idea of picture books and staff led sessions were also well received, positive scores of 62% and 64% respectively. Even the idea of card and board games, which many felt were too old for children under 5, received positive scores from 53% of families. Discussing the suggestions, some families became animated about the possibilities. They suggested both a separate area for families with young children and the need for activities to be integrated throughout the displays.

Families clearly value the courtyard garden as an informal family space. They like the freedom it offers their children to move around and to touch. Most families seem to discover the garden accidentally. They were very positive about “The sheds” as they referred to the Alternative Flower Show, seeing it as family friendly and interactive. Experience from a number of museums has shown that pre-school children respond well to modern art. The combination of a modern art installation, with interactivity in a family friendly space has proved to be very successful and could be built upon.

### **5 Key recommendations**

This report recommends that the Museum should add some activities specifically aimed at younger children to its activity menu. Given that younger children are able to visit the Museum in family groups during term time, at least some of these activities should be available beyond weekends and holidays. Activities should be added to gallery spaces, not just the Activity Cart.

The Museum needs to provide better buggy access and should consider improving its facilities and services for families with young children. Whilst some improvements may be structural and expensive, others are simply a matter of considering this audience's needs and tweaking what is already on offer.

Families with young children visit in a very focused way. They often make short visits, but will come back on many repeat visits. They will often seek to combine a number of places in one day out. They do not expect all parts of a museum to be suitable for young children, but they do hope that the Museum will guide them in finding what is suitable. The Museum needs to provide better orientation information for these families.

Families with young children provide an interesting new audience that the Museum could develop. There are already significant numbers of these families visiting or living in South Kensington. They are able and willing to visit and to visit regularly and not always at peak times. Significantly, the ethnic profile of the existing family audience is much more inclusive than the Museum's overall profile. Widening access to families with young children holds the prospect of broadening the Museum's audience overall in terms of cultural diversity.

## 5.1 add activities for very young children

The back pack trolley already includes an “under 5s” pack that aims to include younger children when their family is using a backpack. This approach should be expanded. Rather than a separate, all purpose, under 5s bag, family backpacks could themselves include activities for younger children. Equally a backpack specifically for families with just children under 5 could also be added and this might cover more than one gallery taking a theme likely to be popular with this age group: for example animals, shiny things, mothers and babies, naked people. The open ended paper and crayons aspect of the current under 5s bag should be kept, but activities should move away from being a bit schooly to being more playful, for example instead of giving worksheet style sheets with initial letters, children could have a dice with initial letters on. They could roll the dice and see what they can find in the gallery beginning with that letter. Since initial letter sounds are really only suitable for children 3-4 and above, there should also be games or activities for children under 4, for example, colour dice.

The Activity Cart should also add activities for younger children. This could be both simplified versions of existing activities (where templates have been pre-cut for example and children can go straight to the decorating) and new activities, for example based on pretend play. In South Asia for example the Cart could include a box of plastic animals found in South Asia for children to play with. They can make up stories and games with them but they could also take them round the gallery and try to find examples of each. The Cart should carefully consider its positioning in each of its locations. Families need to be able to see the Cart from entrances if possible. Including seating and defining the area for families to work in is also helpful for families with young children. It enables them to feel children are permitted to be themselves in that space. From the Museum’s perspective using blocks and mats gives the Museum an element of control over where families go and where they take the Cart’s resources.

In addition to adding a young children’s element to the back packs, Activity Cart and family events, the Discovery Areas in the British Galleries are key areas where young children’s activities could be added. In some cases this might mean adding things to an existing activity, for example small figures, trees etc to the Crystal Palace building set or small versions of accessories or costumes to try on. In other cases this may mean adding dedicated boxes with appropriate, collections related activities inside. Developing these activities would mean that there would be things for families with young children to do at all times and beyond the Activity Cart, into the Museum.

There are other areas dotted around the Museum where it would be possible to add activities, even if these are simply story stops where families can sit on comfortable chairs and look at books related to nearby exhibits. The Courtyard Garden is already a popular area with families. Although of course weather dependant, more could be done both to flag this area to families and to provide things for families to do there. Developing exhibitions such as the Alternative Flower Show that have appeal right across the age group is one way forward. Modern art installations often have the potential to do this. Adding activities or even locating the Activity Cart there could also work. An outdoor Activity Cart particularly aimed at children under 5 could be put here during the warmer months.

In the longer term the Museum should consider creating a dedicated family area where families could engage with activities. Some of these could be quite messy, they would be



available at all times and the space could include comfort facilities such as comfortable seating, feeding facilities and refreshments.

## 5.2 improve access

Families with children under 5 have much in common with disabled people in terms of access. Very young children are often unable to walk far, if at all. They require level access, lifts and ramps. They bring extra equipment with them. They need special toilet facilities. These include not just changing tables for babies, but suitable toilets for toddlers and enough space in cubicles for young children to be accompanied by an adult. Toilets created for disabled people are often very helpful for families with young children as they provide more space than mainstream adult toilets. Very young children often have little notice that they need the toilet and therefore their adults need to either be very close to a toilet or at least know how far they have to run.

In addition, feeding very young children is a central issue for visiting families. Babies may need breast feeding somewhere quiet, or may need bottles or baby food warmed. Toddlers and pre-schoolers are often quite selective about the food they will eat. Families need to buy reasonably priced food since there is a high risk of it being rejected. Young children can't help but be messy when eating and may need to eat often to keep their blood sugar levels high. They also need to drink often. Indeed one of the points on the Guardian Reader's Family Friendly Manifesto was that museums should provide cold tap water free.

The Museum should improve its physical access for families with young children. A buggy users audit should be undertaken to identify the worst problems. This report has found that the Main Entrance presents difficulties, the doors at the tops of ramps (for example the ramp that leads to the Exhibition Road entrance) are problematic and that doors throughout the Museum often inhibit buggy and toddler access, both by being heavy to move and by being opaque so that visitors cannot see whether there are obstacles (or small children) on the other side.

The Museum should improve its facilities. A study should look carefully at the potential to improve the issue of toilets for families. This may be better signing to existing toilets, re-designating disabled peoples' toilets as disabled and family toilets or it may be possible to provide a family cubicle in each set of toilets by merging two toilets. Since the toilets are gender specific however, this alone would not be enough. In future plans, the Museum should consider providing sets of family toilets where fathers and mothers can take their children.

Other facilities such as seating, cloakroom, lockers and eating facilities, including the cafes, should be audited for family friendliness. Following parents' suggestions in this study, the Museum should consider developing one café or eating place as more family friendly with a slightly different menu, family meal deals, high chairs, buggy access and toilets close to hand.

## 5.3 improve intellectual access

Adding the activities recommended above would provide a significant improvement in intellectual access. This report also recommends however that in future planning the Museum considers using lower cases, with floor length visibility. Many of the newer

cases provide good visible access for young children but older cases tend not to. In respect of older cases, the Museum could consider providing step stools to particularly popular exhibits. Parents spend too much time in the Museum lifting their children to see exhibits.

In addition, the Museum should consider supporting parents in providing collections based information in certain key galleries. These could take the form of Family Guides to specific galleries. These could be available as laminated sheets at the entrances to specific galleries for parents to use and return. The information provided should be based on the things families are interested to find out about the objects on display. This report recommends that the Museum consult families to find out what they would most like to find out about specific displays and pilot some family gallery guides as a first step in helping families to feel they don't have to "make it up."

#### 5.4 improve orientation information

Family adults have to plan museum visits for them to be successful. With the spread of ages and interests in family groups, adults have to balance the agendas of all family members and particularly keep the youngest members happy and comfortable, if the day is to be a success. To do this they need information.

The Museum needs to improve its information for families, particularly orientation information. This is especially important for new visitors or for non-visitors to museums, making their first ventures into a museum.

The Museum should produce a young families' map. In practice this may simply need to be a Family Map, suitable for families with children of all ages. The map should highlight galleries where the collections may be of interest to children and where there are things to do. The map should give information about what these things are so that families can plan their visit. The map could also remind families to ask for the location of the Activity Cart at weekends and on holidays. Ramps, lifts and stairs should be clearly marked: much more clearly than on the current map, which families find extremely confusing, as do most visitors.

Signs with "What's on today for families" should be clearly visible in both entrances. The video screen does not work for families. Relying on visitors to ask staff is not acceptable and the quality of the staff response is currently left to chance. Since some families will always want to ask staff however, all Front of House staff should be informed about what the Museum can offer families. Observation showed that some were excellent in asking the age of children and trying to recommend appropriate places or activities. Others seemed to have little knowledge of what to offer and some seemed to have little sympathy for children being in the Museum at all. In addition to the signs, the Museum should consider a family flier that gives "What's on today?" information. This could be used to both raise families' awareness of the services available and, on the reverse, could promote forthcoming events or activities.

Signs should also be provided pointing to activities. The Activity Cart in particular should be flagged from each entrance to the gallery it is in. The Discovery Areas would be improved with more obvious signage and any new activities added should be clearly signalled. Whilst the Family Map should enable better use of the British Galleries it would also be useful to sign them from the Main Entrance in a more obvious way for families.

Their name doesn't suggest they might be of interest to families. A family icon might be a useful way to signal to families that certain galleries have the potential to interest young children.

The Activity and Back Pack Carts should structure their orientation role. This might include "What's on" signs, flier distribution and even acting as a reference point for families on other museums in London, or even nationwide, signposting places that have special provision for very young children. Whilst the number of visits such families might make to museums is not limitless, raising awareness of other potential sites to visits is not necessarily "promoting the competition." Providing this information promotes the idea of the V & A as a family friendly place with family interests at heart. The Museum is likely to benefit by association with other family friendly organisations and families who get into the habit of visiting museums may simply increase the number of overall visits they make.

The Map, tips on good things to do and advice on what's available for families through weekend events, Activity Cart and so on should be available on the Museum's web site. This information should be easy to find. This might mean having a "Bringing young children?" button early on in the navigation so that parents with young children can be quickly routed to the appropriate information.

## 5.5 build relationships with young families

Young families can form a very loyal audience. Since the children at least are at the beginning of their museum going lives, this is an audience that can literally be grown over time. Building a good relationship with families with young children is helping guarantee a future for the Museum.

To this end, the Museum should consider working with other museums. In the first instance obvious partners are the other two South Kensington museums. Families already combine visits across the three museums. This offers an opportunity for joint marketing and for joint development of provision. For example, one parent suggested that the V & A could establish an under 5s club for families with children under 5. This initiative could be run jointly across all three museums, sharing the costs and increasing likely take up. Special young family deals could be offered across the museums, promoting days that combine visiting two or three museums together.

In the V & A's case, the existing young family audience has a cultural diversity that many museums would be envious of. In building relationships with this existing audience and in improving the offering to them, the Museum may be in a position to turn these already loyal visitors into champions and to increase its numbers of visitors from ethnic minority groups. Special events to "bring friends along to", clubs or mailing lists to join, newsletters with special family discounts, deals in the café, new activities promoted through mail outs and so on could all help build this relationship.

## 6 Gathering the evidence

### 6.1 data gathering

In a study of this kind, where qualitative information is required but a reasonably large sample is necessary to establish the range of views, it is advisable to adopt a range of data gathering tools.

Interviewing families with young children is problematic. It is not always possible, relevant or appropriate to interview children under 5. There is a limit to what children under 3 can say. There is a limit to what children under 4 can remember. Many children under 5 are shy with unfamiliar adults and some families don't like to encourage that interaction. Interviewing family adults is no easier. In charge of a young child or children, adults rarely have time to stop and talk. Supervision of the children takes all their concentration. For these reasons traditional methods of approaching museum visitors are rarely successful with families with young children.

The methods used in this study were therefore determined partly in response to these limiting factors and also in response to the need for a balance between qualitative and quantitative information. A range of methods were used to produce data that could be stacked up and triangulated against each other, making the resulting findings more robust.

Methods used were:

- face to face structured interviews, with family adults
- observation of families with young children using the art cart and attending an event
- accompanied visits with two families, including visiting the British Galleries

The accompanied visits took place on a week day during term time. Families were invited to the Museum and were given no direction apart from being asked to include the British Galleries in their visit. The duration of their visit was not pre-determined and they were encouraged to consider the evaluator as part of their family group, thus minimising the observer effect. No additional activities or events were on offer during that time.

### 6.2 the sample

The sample varied for each method. The interviews and the observation were dependent upon the families that visited during the sample period: a half term holiday, including a Bank Holiday weekend. During the holiday the weather was generally good and the number of families using the Museum a little lower than expected. For this reason, the sample included almost every family with children under 5 that used either the Activity Cart or took part in the event. A final sample of 55 families was achieved.

Observations took place at the Activity Cart and in the Main Entrance.

Two families were observed during accompanied visits. Neither family had visited the V & A before. One family had visited museums before, but only small local museums. The other family had never visited a museum before. One family had one child aged 4, the other had a 2 year old and a 4 year old. Both families had only one adult for the visit, in both cases the mother.

## 7 Findings in detail: the interviews

### 7.1 family make up

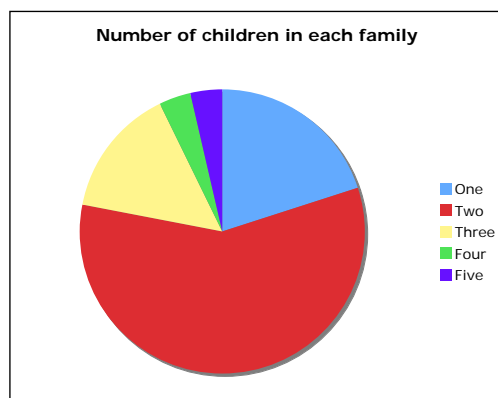
Families were asked a number of questions relating to the make up of their group. Families, even families with children under 5, is something of an umbrella term and the Museum was keen to know the make up of these families since the combination of ages of children, number of children and number of adults in a family group can all played determining factors if a family's needs and likely behaviour.

#### 7.1.1 number of children

Families with children under 5 vary in the number of children that make up the group. The majority, some 58%, have two children, with one and then three children being the next most common. Some groups had four or five children. These findings are in line with research on family group size carried out in other museums, looking at all families.

Number of children in each family

One	11
Two	32
Three	8
Four	2
Five	2
Total: 55	



#### 7.1.2 age of children in each family

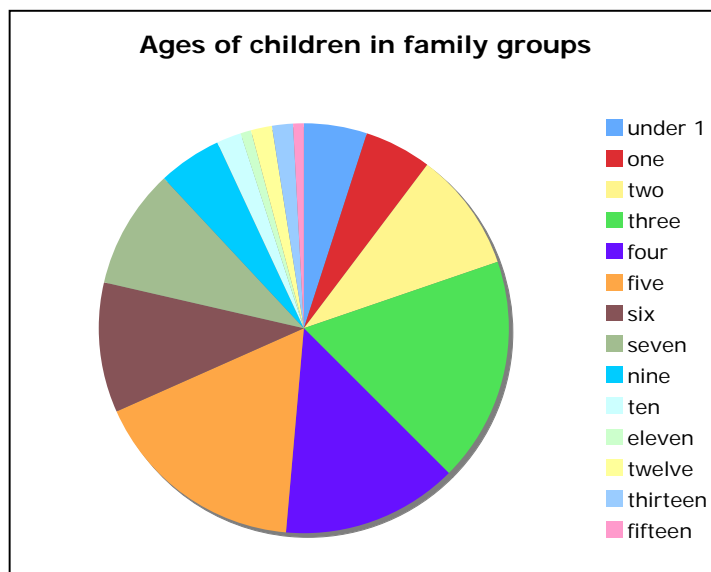
Given that the families asked had to include children 5 or under, the spread of ages within the families interviewed is unsurprisingly clustered towards the bottom end. However, the 43 families that brought more than one child, included 36 children over 5, demonstrating that many children under 5 come with an older sibling.

Families bringing more than one child were relatively evenly divided between those families where the children were all 5 or under, and those that included older siblings. 58% included children over 5, whilst 42% had only younger children.

The most common age for children in families under 5 is therefore from 3 to 5. It should be noted however that couples with just one baby (child under 2) were observed in the Museum, but do not generally appear in the sample. Children under 2 are therefore likely to be under-represented in this study.

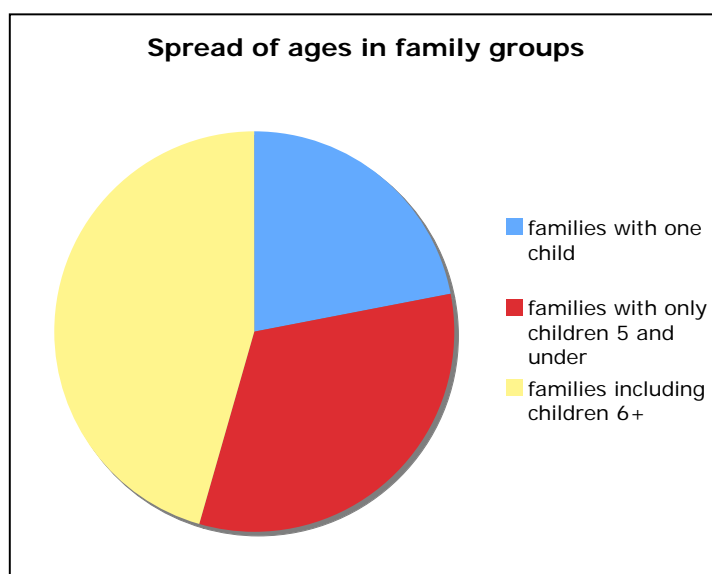
### Age of children in families

0	6
1	6
2	11
3	21
4	16
5	20
6	12
7	11
8	0
9	6
10	2
11	1
12	2
13	2
14	0
15	1
	Total children: 117



### The spread of ages within families

Families with only one child	12
Families with only children 5 and under	18
Families including children 6+	25
	Total families: 55



#### 7.1.3 gender of children

There were more girls than boys in the families interviewed. 61% of the children in the families were girls with 39% boys. 49% of families had no boys in them whilst only 22% of the families had no girls in them.

#### 7.1.4 adults in the family group

The majority of families interviewed came with two adults. Although this was most commonly two parents, there were also instances of friends, sisters, grandparents with parents and a nanny and an au pair. Since the study took place in the school holiday period, the findings may not be representative. However, when talking about other museums trips the family had made, many of the families clearly expected to visit museums as a two adult unit. The adults were quite evenly split between men and women, with 40% men and 60% women. Of the single adults bringing children however, 83% were female.

**Adults relationship to children**

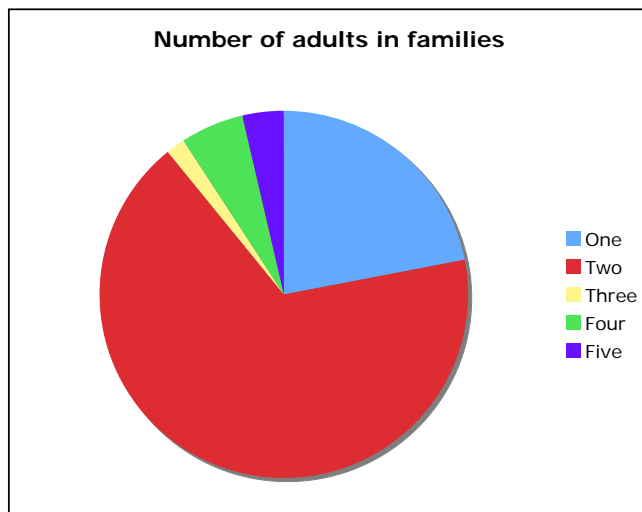
Parent	95
Grandparent	3
Carer	5
Other	5
	Total adults: 108

**Gender of adults**

Male	43
Female	65
	Total adults: 108

**Number of adults in the family group**

One	12
Two	37
Three	1
Four	3
Five	2
	Total families: 55

**7.2 family background**

Families were asked where they came from, which ethnic group they most identified with and their employment status, as an indicator of socio-economic status. Whilst the wide variety of ethnic backgrounds appears unusually high compared to what might be expected in museums, the relative homogeneity of employment status, indicates that, irrespective of ethnicity, the families visiting were overwhelmingly in social groups 1,2 and 3: managers, professionals and associate professionals.

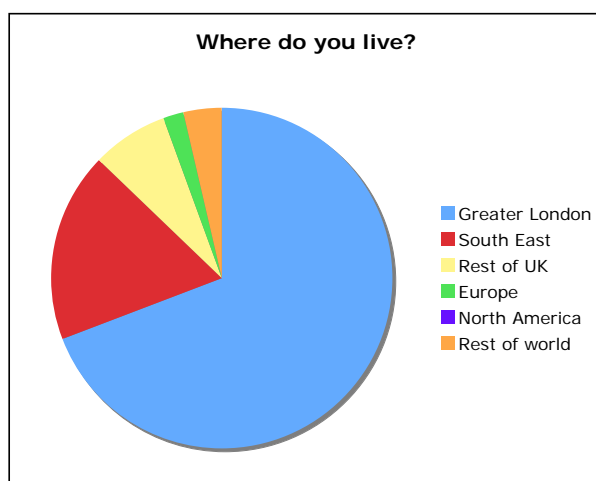


### 7.2.1 Where families live

The overwhelming majority of the families interviewed came from Greater London. Some families mentioned living close by and feeling the V & A was their local museum (usually along with the other South Kensington museums).

#### Where do you live?

Greater London	38
South East	10
Rest of the UK	4
Europe	1
North America	0
Rest of the world	2
	Total families: 55



### 7.2.2 Ethnic background

The majority of families identified themselves as British. There were many other backgrounds identified however, indicating that the V & A attracts a much more culturally diverse family audience than many other museums. This is also reflected in family comments about the exhibitions they visited, which frequently feature South Asia, China and Japan.

Whilst White British was the most common background, it only accounted for 35% of the families interviewed. Even if other white backgrounds are added together, families from non-white backgrounds make up 19% of the sample, significantly above the percentage of ethnic minority groups in the general population.

What is the relationship between this and the overall Museum profile?

**Which ethnic group do you most identify with?**

White British	19
White Irish	4
Any other white background	12
Black Caribbean	1
Black African	0
Any other Black background	0
Indian	5
Bangladeshi	0
Pakistani	0
Any other Asian background	1
Mixed white/Afro Caribbean	2
Mixed white/African	2
Mixed white/Asian	3
Other mix	4
Chinese	1
Other: Middle East	1
	Total families: 55

**7.2.3 Occupations**

Given the depth and amount of information being asked for in the family interviews, questions on socio-economic background were restricted to identifying family occupations. This meant that a number of families were impossible to accurately categorise because their definitions of their jobs were not specific enough. However of the 55 families, 49 provided enough evidence to confidently determine their major social group.

What is your occupation or your partner's occupation?

1 Managers and senior officials	5
2 Professional occupations	30
3 Associate professional/technical occupations	9
4 Administrative and secretarial occupations	0
5 Skilled trades occupations	1
6 Personal service occupations	4
7 Sales and customer service occupations	0
8 Process, plant and machine operatives	0
9 Elementary occupations	0

The overwhelming majority of families fall into the Major group: Professionals. Of these, the most common occupations were teacher followed by doctor.

**7.3 families as museum visitors**

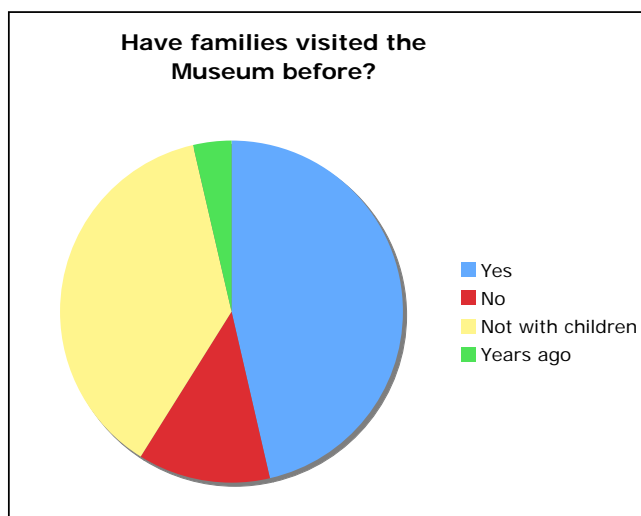
Families were asked whether they had been to the V & A before and whether they had been to other museums. They were asked to give examples of those they had been to.

The overwhelming majority of visitors (88%) had been to the Museum before. Although not formally offered the option as a response, 38% of families indicated they had been to the Museum before without children but were bringing the children for the first time.

### Have families been to the Museum before?

Yes	26
No	7
Not with the children	21
Years ago	2
Total Families: 56	

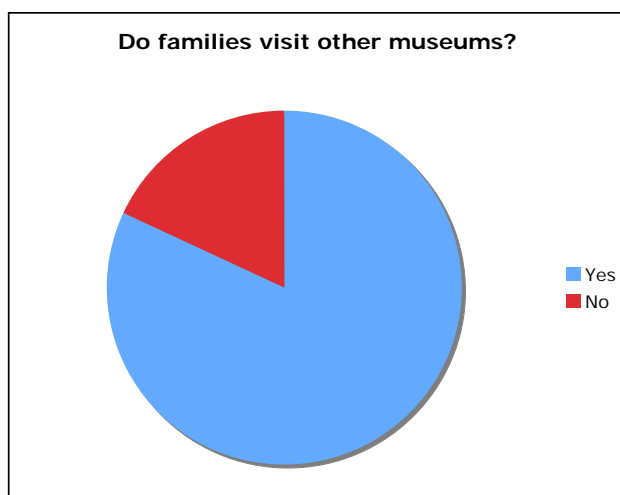
One family answered twice since the children had been before but the parents hadn't.



82% of families also went to other museums. The most commonly mentioned were the other South Kensington museums: the Natural History Museum, mentioned by 20 families and the Science Museum mentioned by 11. This indicates that the majority of families with young children in the V & A are not only familiar with the V & A, but are experienced and committed museum goers.

### Do families with young children go to other museums?

Yes	45
No	10
Total families: 55	



#### Other museums mentioned

Natural History Museum	12
Science Museum	11
National Gallery	3
Imperial War Museum	2
Toy Museum	1
Tate Britain	1
Tate Modern	1
Horniman Museum	1
Transport Museum	1
British Museum	1

### 7.4 why do families with young children come to the V & A?

Families gave a wide range of reasons why they came. They were not restricted to one reason per family.

Come specifically for an activity or event	11
Usually visit the V & A or other museum	11
Visiting a specific collection, object or exhibition	10
Visiting or had visited another museum	9
Somewhere to go on a bank holiday	9
Someone recommended it	8
Somewhere to go in the rain	5
Related to school work	3
Free entry	2
Seeing Queen Victoria and Albert	2
Looked on the internet	2
Been before and ran out of time	1

These findings illustrate the importance of activities as a key attractor for families. Not only are families often coming for specific activities or events, but many of the regular visitors were also attracted by the activities.

It is also important to notice the relationship between the V & A and other museums. Families often spoke of visiting other South Kensington museums. This was sometimes a choice between which to do on any one visit, but often was in the context of families combining visits to two of the three in one day. Two families interviewed had come to visit the Natural History Museum but on finding it closed at 10.00 had come to the V & A instead. They intended to go on to the Natural History Museum later. Indeed, both families from the accompanied visits combined the three museums on their visit. One parent being interviewed at the Activity Cart had asked at the front desk for recommendations of where else in London to take children and was keen to ask the evaluator for advice. The Museum needs to consider its provision within the context of the other museums in London and may have opportunities to actively develop and promote its provision in partnership rather than in competition.

As one parent commented: "If it isn't good here, we just nip back to the Science Museum", effectively minimising the risk of a day out that the children haven't enjoyed.

## **7.5 What do families with young children think of the Museum?**

Families were asked a number of questions relating to their opinion of the Museum. These included where they had been, what their children had most enjoyed in the Museum and where they might go next, how family friendly they felt the facilities were and whether anything had surprised them about the V & A.

Interestingly, for 49% of families the Activity Cart was their first stop. For a small number of families, the Activity Cart was their only experience of the Museum, since they came specifically for it and aimed to go home directly afterwards. For many it formed the main plank of their time, with families reporting they would wander around and see what took children's interest after their activity, but the clear implication was the activity was the main focus of the visit. As one mother commented; "The V & A is where she does the art trolley".

The questions about where families had been or planned to go are recorded separately below for families who were interviewed at the Activity Cart and those interviewed after taking part in the event with the digital cameras. The nature of the activity was crucial in determining the responses, so the findings make more sense when the context is clear.

### **7.5.1 how did families find out about the activity?**

16 of the 55 families (29% of the sample) were interviewed after taking part in the digital camera event. The remaining 71% were interviewed whilst their children took part in an Activity Cart activity.

Whilst 5 of the 16 families doing the event came specifically for it and knew about it from advertising, the majority found out when they were in the Museum. In addition, many of the families interviewed using the Activity Cart went on to take part in the event, having learned about it from the staff on the day. Whilst the event may well have added value to the visits of families with young children therefore, over the Bank Holiday weekend, it did not appear to bring in many extra visits. Given the positive feedback on the event, more promotion may be needed for such events in future.

Findings from both sets of data underline the importance of front of house staff. Clearly it is important that all front of house staff know about the activities on offer as many families rely on this information to either find out about the existence, or location, of activities. Front Desk staff need to be actively promoting the activities as some appear to be doing. Cloakroom staff also seem to be proactive in making suggestions to families. This should be encouraged and all front of house staff should be aware of what is on offer. Positioning the back pack trolley so prominently near the Main Entrance can also be seen to be useful. Families frequently noticed the trolley and consulted staff there. Only one family mentioned using the video projector in the entrance.

Overall, the majority of families are getting information on activities from staff. This opens the system up to variation. Better signage, a family guide or a what's on today flier, much more simple than the leaflet, might be worth considering. Since a small number of families are still finding the Activity Cart in passing, it is important to consider how visible it is from obvious passing points.

**How did families find out about the activity?**

Every object tells a story

Told by back pack staff	2
Told by front desk staff	2
Told by cloakroom staff	2
Newspaper	2
Time Out	2
Leaflet	2
Told by someone in café	1
Told by friend	1
Entrance sign	1
Passing	1
	Total families: 16

**Activity Cart**

Passing	6
Leaflet	5
Internet	5
Told by friend	5
Asked at Front Desk	4
Told by front desk staff	3
Asked at the Back Pack station	3
Knew so looked for it	3
Told by back pack staff	2
Told by other staff	2
Video projector in entrance	1
	Total families: 39

**7.5.2 What did families think of the activity they were taking part in?**

Whilst this study was not an in-depth evaluation of the activities currently on offer (partly since they were not designed specifically for families with children under 5), nonetheless families were asked to comment on how good they thought the activity they were doing was for children under 5.

**How good are the Museum's current activities for children under 5?**

1/5	1
2/5	7
3/5	10
4/5	10
5/5	17
Don't know	6
No answer	4
	Total families: 55

Adults were asked to rate activities out of 5. 5/5 is the top score.

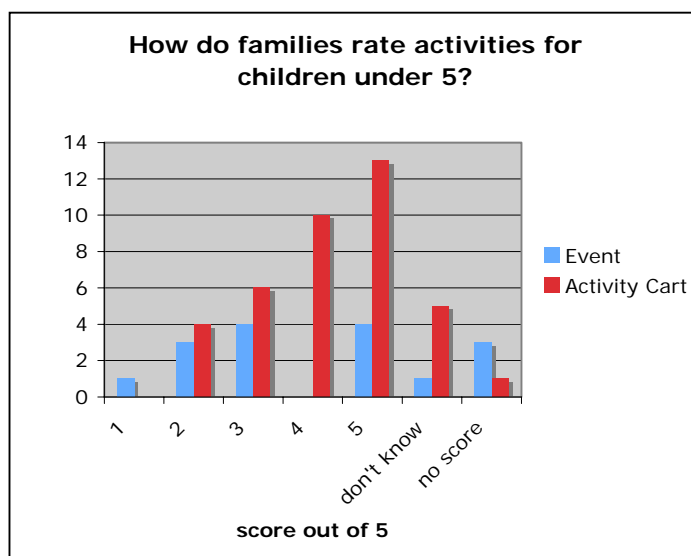
Adult opinion was divided on how good the current activities are. Even those giving high scores (4 or 5) often had suggestions for how the activities might be improved. Overall the Activity Cart scored a little higher than the event, with most families commenting their under 5s found the event a bit difficult.

### Every objects tells a story

1/5	1
2/5	3
3/5	4
4/5	0
5/5	4
Don't know	1
No answer	3
	Total families: 16

### Activity Cart

1/5	0
2/5	4
3/5	6
4/5	10
5/5	13
Don't know	5
No answer	1
	Total families: 39





Parents were asked how the activities could be improved and 36 made suggestions. Some of the suggestions were simply comments. These are grouped below with some individual quotes given as examples. It should be noted that the question was structured to ask for improvements rather than to probe what adults liked about the activities. One adult however in relation to the event spontaneously commented: "It's a nice one to do with a mixture of ages. "

How could the activities be improved?

Too difficult/simplify	15
Add interactives/ touch and feel	6
Painting, sticking, play dough	3
Music, handling, singing	1
Separate family area	1
Children's guide, tour, map	2
More alternatives	1
Have activities more often	1
Under 5s club	1
Staff needed to free up parents	1
Need things lower down	2

Specific suggestions:

Activity Cart

"They can't cut the templates. You could have them pre-cut. It would be easier with just strips."

"They're great providing parents participate. They need some help."

"She can manage but the parents have to guide."

"It's just frustrating. If it's for them, they should be able to do it."

"My five year old can cope but much younger couldn't have."

"It's better for the 4-5 year olds. We need something less complicated for younger ones."

Event:

"You need another way to make the T-shirt. May be fabric crayons."

General:

"Fun but not quite right. The Science Museum is great. They can get on with it and it's safe, although it still needs a lot of input."

"I didn't know there was a garden. The map's not easy to understand."

"They can only look for half an hour, may be an hour, but not day."

### 7.5.3 Where do families go in the Museum?

Families were asked where they had been in the Museum that day and where they might be going next. Since the nature of the event was to encourage families to explore the Museum, the responses from families at the event was rather different to that of families at the Activity Cart. For this reason, the responses are presented separately.

Families were asked where they had been. They were not restricted to one answer.

## Where have families already been in the Museum?

Every object tells a story

"The sheds"	5
Everywhere	5
Fashion	3
India	3
Japan	2
China	2
Sculptures	2
Europe	2
Glass	1
British Galleries	1
Reproductions	1
Armour	1
"just wandered"	1
	Total families: 16

The event clearly succeed in encouraging families to explore at least the ground floor of the Museum. Perhaps disappointingly, families with young children rarely mentioned the British Galleries, where the interactive activities may have appealed to them.

### Activity Cart

Straight here	19
Japan	4
Café	4
Asia	3
"The sheds"	3
Europe	3
Rafael cartoons	2
Dress	2
Vivienne Westwood	2
	Total families: 39

All other destinations were mentioned by just one family each and included: Ceramics, India, Cast courts, China, Bill Brandt, the Korean trail, the tiger, the Buddhas and the digital event.

The most striking finding is that almost half of families, 49%, used the Activity Cart as their first destination in the Museum. Some of the families that had looked in Japan and Asia were families that had come upon the Cart "in passing" and one of the adults who had been to the Vivienne Westwood exhibition explained that they had gone there first for her with the promise to the children that if they could be good, they could go to the Activity Cart next.

**Where do families intend to go after the activity?**

Every object tells a story

Home	8
Lunch	5
Activity Cart	2
Victorian Britain (British Galleries)	1
China	1
"The sheds"	1
Vivienne Westwood	1
May be somewhere if we have time	1
Hyde Park	1
Camden market	1

Activity art

Home	9
Event	4
Walking around	4
Picnic/lunch	3
Asia	2
Natural History Museum	2
Don't know	2
Depends on the children	2
Could you advise please?	2
Somewhere if time allows	2
China	1
Medieval	1
Jewellery	1
Shh	1
Silver trail	1
Backpacks	1
"The sheds"	1
Friends coming	1
Vivienne Westwood	1
	Total families: 39

NB: One mother had rung her two friends (also with children under 5) and arranged for them to join her at the Museum. They arrived as we concluded her interview.

Whilst it is perhaps predictable that families that had seen quite a bit of the Museum through the digital event would elect to go home, it is perhaps more surprising that most families at the Activity Cart did not have a further destination in mind within the Museum. Since only 1 of the 39 families had specific 'next stops' planned within the Museum, the Museum should consider offering more orientation specifically aimed at families with

young children, attached to the Activity Cart. Staff at the Cart were observed advising families about the event and would have happily answered questions on what to do next. However, this function of the Activity Cart (as orientation provider) could be better developed and more formalised. Given that just under half of the families interviewed said they had gone straight to the Activity Cart, it is also reasonable to assume that some families at least are visiting the Activity Cart and then leaving the Museum.

#### 7.5.4 What do families with young children like in the Museum?

Families were asked what they liked in the Museum and what if anything had surprised them. The answers to the two previous questions combine with the results from these to provide a picture of families generally using the ground floor exhibitions relatively near to the entrances. Some parents spoke about the value of introducing their children to artefacts from other cultures and one parent in particular was passionate about the value to his child of seeing her own cultural background in a positive light.

Families also mentioned the size of objects, commenting how children responded well to the Sculpture and cast courts, and indeed, many of the statues around the Museum. Themes such as animals and shiny things were also mentioned. Many families were very positive about the courtyard garden. They welcomed the space it allowed children and the freedom to move without fear of being told not to touch or of accidental breakage. Those that saw the Alternative Flower Show (or “The sheds” as they were universally called) were very positive about them and felt they had been something they could enjoy together as a family.

#### What do families enjoy?

“The sheds”	10
Sculptures	7
Animals, horses, dragon, tiger	7
Structured activities	6
The space/corridors	5
Swords, armour	5
Digital camera event	3
Shiny things	3
Japan	2
Mummies and babies	2
Rude statues	2

In addition the following all received one mention: Vivienne Westwood dresses, crayoning, masks, clothes, trying on the gauntlet, silver lions, Bill Brandt pictures, Buddha, China, South Asia and Chihuly.

Only one parent said that there was nothing that under 5s would enjoy.

Families who were first time visitors or who had not been to the Museum for a long time were asked whether there was anything that surprised them about the Museum. 15 families were asked this question.

**Has anything surprised new visiting families?**

The digital camera event	3
More child friendly than expected	2
The sheds	2
Hands on in British Galleries	2
Not very good for children	1
Bigger than expected	1
Tracey Emin's shed being locked	1
How much the children enjoyed it	1
Can't touch stuff	1
Chihuly glass and tiger	1
	Total families: 15

Whilst the sample for this question is very small it can be surmised that if there is a prevailing preconception of the V & A it is that it is not very good for young children and that people are surprised by both how much the museum offers and the potential it has within its collections to interest children under 5.

Families mentioned that the web site contributed to this pre-conception:

"Looking on the internet I didn't think there was an awful lot here. I'm quite surprised. This was supposed to be just a flying visit but we've stayed longer."

The event also surprised people. "The event area where the T shirts were being made was well resourced. Well run and with nice people. There are so many things to do for young children. I thought it would be for older children, not usually under 5s. This has been a good atmosphere. Going round with a camera's often frowned upon (by museums) but this is good. Seeing lots of families looking at things you would like to look at."

**7.5.5 how family friendly are the Museum's facilities?**

Families were asked to rate the existing facilities out of 5 and to make suggestions for how they could be improved. Not all families had used the facilities, hence the high numbers of don't know or no answers.

How do families rate the existing facilities?

1/5	2
2/5	1
3/5	10
4/5	7
5/5	6
Don't know	19
No answer	10

Of those families that had used the facilities, opinions were divided. The majority gave positive scores (3-5), but with most of these being 3/5 and 4/5, there is a sense that the facilities do need improvement.

Suggestions for improvement were wide ranging.

Restaurant is too expensive	5
Navigation and map is confusing. Needs to be easier	4
Doors are a problem	3
Courtyard café wasn't open	2
Not good for double buggies/buggies	2
Not able to find toilets	2
Long queues in women's toilets	2
Basement not very family friendly	2
Stairs are a problem	2
Toilet ran out of nappies	1
Need more tables for packed lunches	1
Provide a comfortable chair for breastfeeding	1
Toilets too far away	1
Should have a cold water dispenser	1
Need more chairs	1

Specific suggestions were:

The café:

- the lunch boxes are too expensive
- one of the restaurants could be more family friendly
- the Museum could offer discounts through a Museum family club
- the café could offer "family meal deals" not children's. This could be a child's meal and a cup of tea and cake for an adult at a reduced rate

Doors:

- doors at the tops of ramps open "the wrong way" and are very difficult
- lots of doors are heavy and old-fashioned
- you can't see through some of the doors, making it difficult to negotiate with a buggy or very small children
- front entrance revolving doors are very difficult for buggies
- door should be left open

The map/navigation:

- "It take a long time to know the ramps and where they are. I really feel for people in wheelchairs, especially if they are following routes on the map."
- "It's difficult to find your way around. It's not logical for visitors."

In addition some positive comments were made. These included:

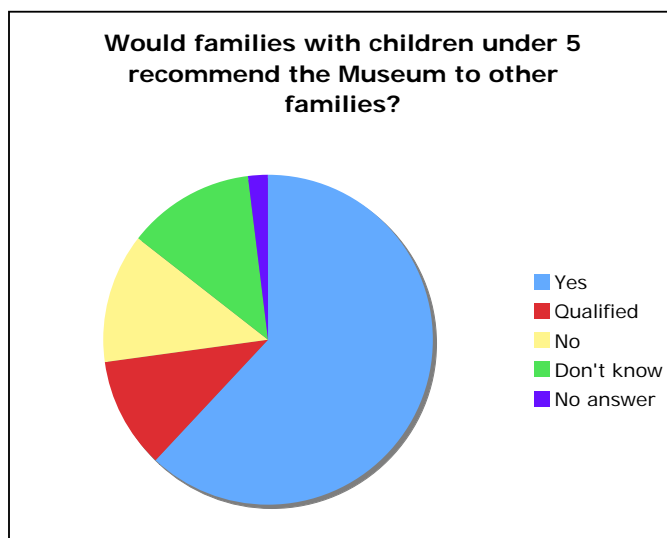
- the buggy went into the cloakroom which was good
- I've never had any trouble
- it's very wheelchair friendly
- access is great but it is difficult to know where you are
- lots of benches around which is good when you've got young ones
- the café's nice
- the garden is great, especially the do touch statues

### 7.5.6 do families feel the good outweighs the bad?

Families were asked whether overall they would recommend the V & A to other families with children under 5. Even allowing for the innate politeness of visitors, the overwhelming majority said they would. Some interesting qualifications were made however, a selection of which are detailed below.

#### Would families with children under 5 recommend the Museum to other families?

Yes	34
Qualified Yes	6
No	7
Don't know	7
No answer	1
	Total families: 55



Quotes:

#### ... from those who said No:

"The curators in the Europe section seemed on edge. They were standing, watching like hawks and were not particularly welcoming. The Science Museum and Natural History Museum they can enjoy on their own. They can get out of the buggy and walk round and there's not a sharp intake of breath. Staff attitude is a determining factor. I'm not enthusiastic to bring them back here."

#### ...from those that gave a qualified yes:

"The activity yes. I don't know whether the rest is really suitable. Not sure there's enough to inspire him to come back. He likes the push buttons at the Science Museum, not really interested in the displays."

"It's really up my 5 year old's street. We'll do the making, but just for a short spell."

**... from those that said Yes:**

"We just meant to pop in, have a flying visit because Victoria wanted to come here (because her name was Victoria), but we've ended up staying much longer."

"It's not overcrowded. We're not having to queue everywhere."

"There are interactive things for children to do. This gives them a positive memory and they'll come back more willingly. Not don't touch, don't run. You need to start them young."

"You can spend a whole day."

"It's easy to park here on Sundays and Bank Holidays."

"I would now, but I wouldn't have before (I came)."

"It gives you the opportunity to spend time with children and do creative work with them. Parents become involved, it's infectious with children."

"We thought it would be for adults."

"I've told lots of people and we're definitely coming again."

"Yes and I do."

**... from those that didn't know:**

"It's still very passive. You need to make it more interactive. Need to give options for people that want different things."

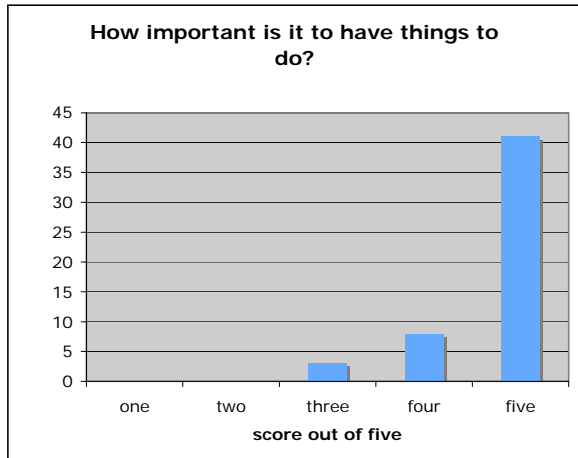
## 7.6 how would families with young children like to see the Museum develop?

Families were adamant that it was important to have things to do for their children. A resounding 74% gave it 5/5. One said: "It determines whether we come." Another gave it a score of 8 out of 5.

### How important is to have things to do?

1/5 (not important)	0
2/5	0
3/5	3
4/5	8
5/5	41
Don't know	1
No answer	2
	Total families: 55



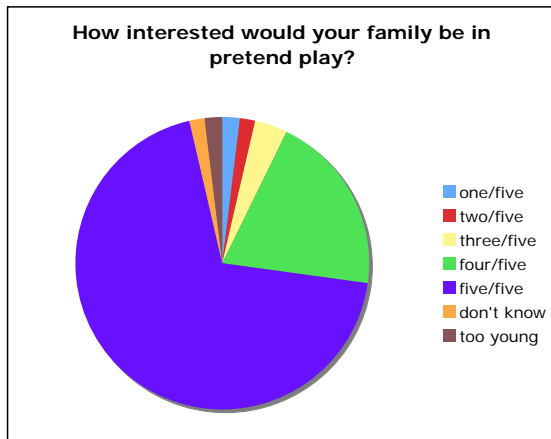


Families were then given a range of options of things the Museum might consider developing. They were asked to score each out of 5 for how interested they would be in them. Unsurprisingly craft activities were very popular, but pretend play was almost equally well received. Touching and handling historical things was very popular, with some parents commenting that touching anything was good, even if it was just a stone or something textured.

Whilst many families liked the idea of having picture books related to the displays, some felt it would be too “schooly” or that children were too young. Similarly with card and board games, children were often felt to be too young and there was a concern that pieces of games would go missing or become tatty. Generally families felt that staff led sessions were a good idea although often they asked for examples. When told that it could be things like storytelling, puppets, musical sessions etc they were often positive, although keen to point out that staff leading the session would need to be experienced in working with very young children.

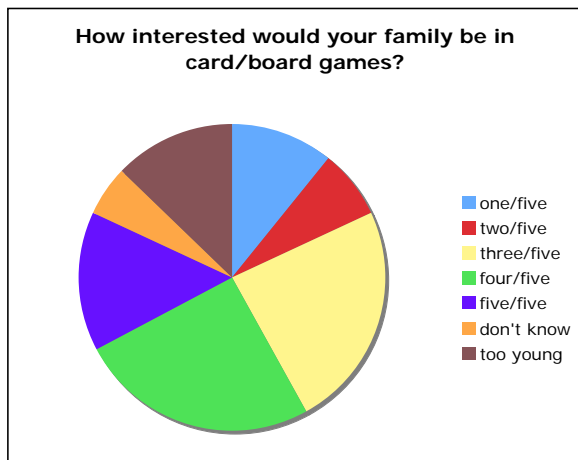
#### 7.6.1 pretend play (e.g. dressing up, role play and puppets)

1/5	1
2/5	1
3/5	2
4/5	11
5/5	38
Don't know	1
Too young	1



### 7.6.2 card and board games

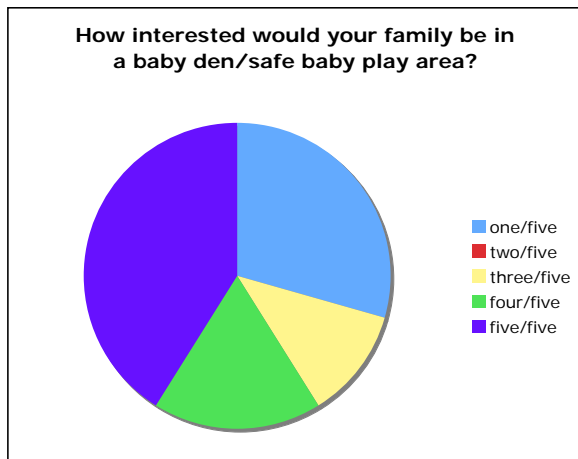
1/5	6
2/5	4
3/5	13
4/5	14
5/5	8
Don't know	3
Too young	7



### 7.6.3 baby den

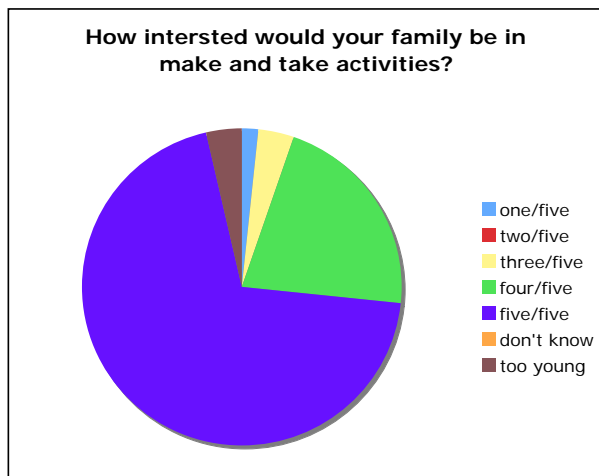
Only families with children under 2 were asked this question.

1/5	5
2/5	0
3/5	2
4/5	3
5/5	7



#### 7.6.4 make and take activities

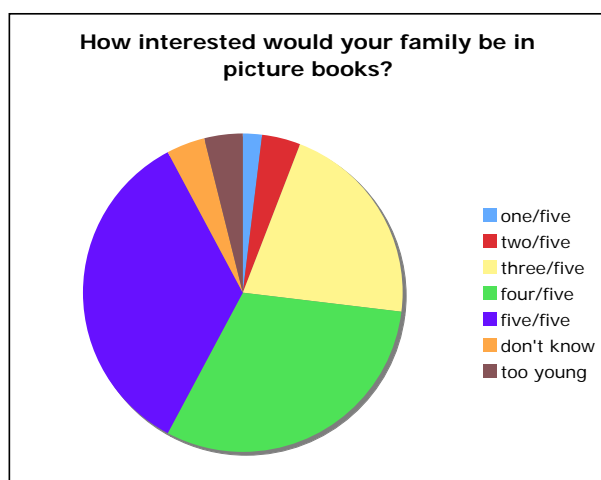
1/5	1
2/5	0
3/5	1
4/5	12
5/5	39
Don't know	0
Too young	2



## 7.6.5 picture books

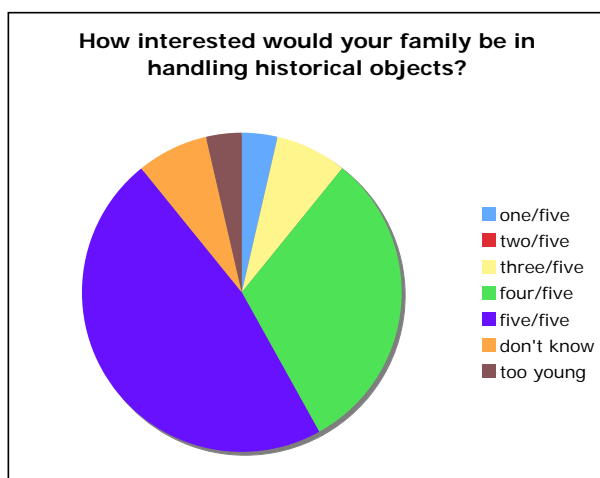
1/5	1
2/5	2
3/5	11
4/5	16
5/5	18
Don't know	2
Too young	2

One family gave no answer, whilst another only wanted books if you could buy them.



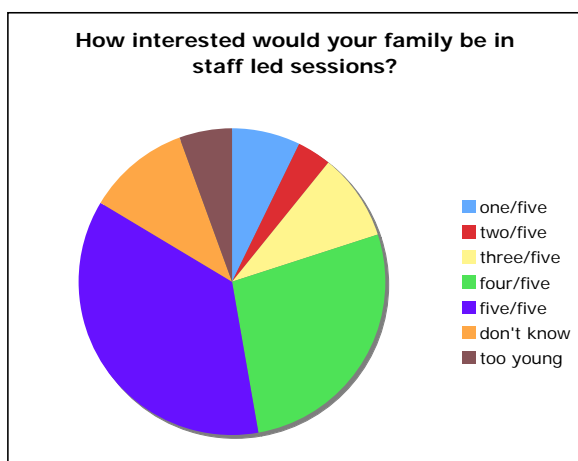
## 7.6.6 historical things to handle

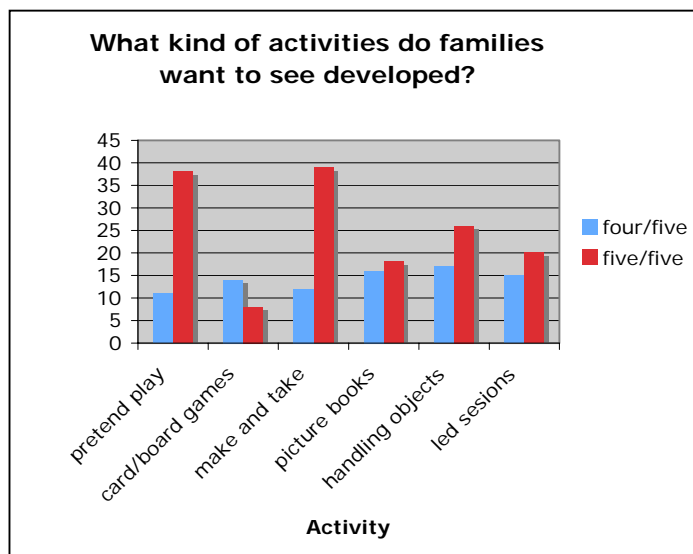
1/5	2
2/5	0
3/5	4
4/5	17
5/5	26
Don't know	4
Too young	2



#### 7.6.6 staff led sessions

1/5	4
2/5	2
3/5	5
4/5	15
5/5	20
Don't know	6
Too young	3





## 7.7 What do families enjoy at other museums?

### Kinds of activities families enjoy

Interactive galleries	15
Interactive exhibits	11
Handling objects/materials	7
Art activities	4
Story telling, puppet shows and story sacks	4
Music	3
Dinosaurs	3
Animals	2
Interactive art installations	1
Trails	1
Hide and seek	1
Face paints	1
Trying costumes on	1
Being part of a group	1
Submarine	1
Layered interpretation	1

Families were overwhelmingly in favour of interaction, activity and participation. Many like the idea of a separate space for very young children or families as they see this gives children the chance to explore independently.

### Other museum mentioned

19 families specifically mentioned the Science Museum, whilst 8 mentioned the Natural History Museum. Tate Modern received 3 mentions (although one was negative) and Tate Britain 2.

The following museums all received one mention:

Horniman Museum, Toy Museum, Imperial War Museum, National Gallery, Jeffrye Museum, the Wallace Collection, the National Portrait Gallery, the Serpentine Gallery and the British Museum. One family mentioned a museum in their native New York.

Specific galleries that were mentioned were:

- the garden at the Science Museum
- Launch Pad at the Science Museum
- Flight Lab at the Science Museum
- Investigate at the Natural History Museum

### **7.8 What do families think is the most important thing the Museum should do to be more user friendly?**

A separate area for families	9
Be more hands on/interactive	9
Have things to touch and feel	7
Have more activities	6
Improve the doors	3
Have fewer stairs, more lifts, more ramps	3
Offer dressing up	2
Offer guided tours for children	2
Provide lower cases or displays or step stools	2

A number of other suggestions were mentioned, each by one family. These are listed since they may provide useful ideas for future development.

- change staff attitude
- cheaper food
- more days of the Activity Cart
- simpler Activity Cart activities
- themed days or events
- activity area for babies
- clearer signs to the baby change
- more on the web site about what there is for families
- family cubicle in toilets
- toilets for children
- rent out buggies for tourists
- a footprint trail
- clearer map
- supervised activities/crèche

Three families said the Museum was “fine as it is.” Indeed one adult said the Museum should: “keep the personality of the Museum. It is a grown up place.” This seems to be a minority view amongst families however.

## **8 Findings in detail: the accompanied visits and observation**

### **8.1 the entrance**

Families have problems with the Main Entrance. The revolving doors do not take buggies. This is not clear however and families' experience of supermarket revolving doors would lead them to expect that they could use them. The opening door that is buggy accessible is not clearly marked and has to be opened by staff. Both accompanied visit families had difficulty entering the foyer and in observation, many families had the same difficulty.

The Entrance and foyer, in line with much of the body language of the Museum, project an impression of the V & A as a place for adults only. The Museum should be an inclusive place where families and children feel as welcomed and valued as independent adult visitors. Obvious areas for improvement include: making the doors accessible, providing information tailored to families, providing toilets with family facilities near the entrances and creating an area in the shop that serves families needs. At present children's' books are at the far end of the shop to get to which families with young children would have to walk through intimidating displays, reminiscent of a china or glassware shop.

### **8.2 information for families**

Staff are generally friendly and proactive in giving families information. Both accompanied visit families picked up maps and were not offered anything else. However, the observer effect may have played a part here. Observation showed that many families make the Back Pack trolley their first stop. From the main entrance it is visible and, when the pennant is facing the right way, signals itself as a family point. The staff at the trolley frequently give families information about other activities to combine with or replace the back packs.

Families are keen to get information on arrival and will approach any member of staff in the vicinity. Families were observed being advised by staff on the front desk, at the cloakroom and in the "corridor" as well as the back pack team. Families were observed trying to use the map and having difficulty.

As the accompanied families went round the building, they used a combination of the map and allowing the children to choose where to go. The children were particularly keen on the stairs, which resulted in one mother carrying her (empty) buggy up and down stairs. This was not, in itself, a problem whilst the effort was seen to be to a constructive end, but became one when the families became "lost" and found themselves re-covering ground. Both families tried to use wall maps to supplement the hand held map and were unable to make sense of them.

The non-visitor mother tended to rely on wandering as a method of getting round. This is likely to be unsuccessful in a museum the size of the V & A, with very young children who need to be engaged. The second mother, with some experience of a local museum, looked at the map and gave her daughter a limited choice of places to go based on what she thought would be interesting. The map however offers no information about what would be good for children.



The net result of these actions meant that both families saw relatively little of the Museum and what they did see was not necessarily the most appropriate or likely to engage.

### **8.3 where is good for families with young children?**

In the absence of the Activity Cart or an event, families need to find other activities. These do exist in the Museum but there is no information to enable families to find them. Both accompanied families found and used hands on activities by accident.

#### **8.3.1 the Silver Study Area**

The stamp a coin activity in the Silver Study area worked fine, but the family was disappointed that they couldn't do the rubbings because there were no pencils. Given the attraction of shiny things to children under 5, the Silver Study Area has the potential to house more activities suitable for young children. Both accompanied families visited the silver gallery. One was looking for the stamping activity but missed it, highlighting the need to make the activity area more obvious.

#### **8.3.2 the British Galleries**

Both accompanied families went to the British Galleries as the only pre-determined part of the exercise. Given the rest of the itinerary and the difficulty they had navigating to the British Galleries using the map, it is unlikely that either family would have chanced across them. Both found the first Discovery Area (near the Great Bed of Ware) and used the activities there.

Whilst the non-visitor mother was pleased to see a Discovery Area (Oh look. Something to do.") she was not comfortable with the activities. She assumed (rightly) from the appearance of the activities that they were designed for older users and was therefore unsure what the children were allowed to do. The children were engaged with using the paper and pencils from the saga writing, but she was not comfortable with this.

Some of the activities were successful, for example the rubbings and trying on the gauntlet, however it is the mother who calls an end to the visit. She has clearly had enough and is beginning to find it rather stressful.

In contrast the mother with only one child to supervise and a little more experience in museums made greater use of the Area. Despite initial feelings that the touch screen design a coat of arms might be too complex, they persevered and found that it was usable. The family also looked at the mystery objects, tried on a ruff and tried weaving, although this was too difficult. The mother commented that it would have been no effort for the Museum to have provided a very simple plaiting or paper weaving activity alongside the more adult ones. Despite the parent feeling the appeal of the activities was limited, her 4 year old daughter wanted to go on to find another Discovery Area, so they carried on through the British Galleries to the next one. At no point could they find confirmation that there was another one and they almost walked past it when they did find it.

The galleries themselves became more family friendly as the objects became more recent. Earlier displays were necessarily dark and the objects outside of the child (and

parent's) experience. The family who venture further into the galleries enjoyed looking at furniture, domestic objects, chandeliers and the Cinderella coach. They loved the "gold room", where they danced together as the mother explained to her child that this would have been a ballroom. They compared later beds with the earlier ones. They visited two other Discovery Areas and tried on crinolines, built a crystal palace and put cloth into frames to make costumes. Only the crystal palace building was age appropriate enough for the child to engage with it without much adult input. The little girl used the bricks to create a "palace" with a dance floor which she used her fingers to dance across.

Overall, whilst the Discovery Areas were enjoyed by this family, the mother felt they were rather hard work and not really designed for young children. All of the dressing up for example was so big as to be almost useless for children under 5. These areas offer an opportunity to house some more age appropriate activities, but as yet, what is on offer could only be used by committed parents, with museum experience and preferably only one child to facilitate.

One parent in the interviews felt that the "enclosed" feeling of the galleries in the British Galleries made them less suitable for families with young children than galleries in for example the Science Museum. Whilst it is true that young children love the freedom of being in large spaces, the accompanied family who explored the British Galleries said they liked the room size of the exhibitions. That it was more on a domestic scale and therefore more welcoming, less overwhelming.

### 8.3.3 galleries close to the entrances

Both families spent time in galleries on route from the entrances. Whilst these undoubtedly have wonderful artefacts, they are not always the most appealing or accessible for young children. Both families for example looked in the Medieval Treasury. This is a necessarily dark gallery, with mainly religious objects (difficult to explain to children under 5) that are mainly displayed too high for young children to see. It was in this gallery that the four year old from the non-visitor family uttered the words: "I'm bored. Are we going home now?"

Both families also walked through the Europe galleries. Again these are not easy to interpret for young children although both families tried.

The non-visitor family were initially attracted by statues towards China. They entered the exhibition to see displays of ceramics. The little girl immediately asks: "What's that Mummy?" to which Mum has no reply. Instead she mutters: "This isn't something they're really going to be interested in ... or me." This negative experience of not being able to answer her child's questions, not finding interesting information for herself about the objects and a sense of looking for something that might engage the children (but fearing there wasn't anything) meant the visit started relatively negatively. The mother's preconceptions were confirmed by the experience of the Museum they had.

Neither family explored the Sculpture or Cast courts, Dress or the parts of Japan, China or South Asia that house child friendly artefacts like clothing, animals, armour, weapons and shiny things.

Both went to Silver and encountered the problem of not being able to touch the lions. Both families did not have enough experience of museums to prevent their children

touching. Both had to be “told off”. In addition, both went to Church Plate and both backtracked back through Silver trying to find their way to something with more of a family friendly feel.

The galleries close to the Main entrance have much to offer families with young children, but the Museum needs to be proactive in raising families awareness of this and helping them make sense of them.

#### 8.3.4 the courtyard garden

One of the accompanied families used the courtyard garden. Unfortunately for them the Alternative Flower Show exhibition was just being installed, so they could not visit it. However they very much enjoyed the space and felt comfortable there. Observation of families showed that those that either knew of or came across the garden, found it a very family friendly space. They especially enjoyed the exhibition as it had things to see, do, touch and go into.

The Museum should make families more aware of this space and should seek to schedule exhibits and installations for the space that are likely to engage the young family audience. It would also be a good space for the Activity Cart or events, perhaps with an indoor back up should the weather change.

### 8.4 non-visitors and new visitors

Accompanying two families round, one that never visited museums and one that occasionally did but hadn't visited a national museum before, provided an insight into issues the Museum will face should it want to develop this audience.

Neither family stayed very long. The non-visitor mother entered the building feeling museums weren't for her and left feeling the same way. Interestingly in the afternoon she took her children to the Natural History Museum and had her preconceptions challenged. She ended the day commenting she would go back to the Natural History Museum.

Both mothers had pre-conceptions about the Museum. The non-visitor thought there would be more about Queen Victoria, whilst the new visitor remembered being bored in museum like this as a child. She also expected “more British stuff”.

Both were confused about what to do and where to go in the Museum. Both missed parts their children may have responded better to than the parts they did see. Neither would have visited the British Galleries left to their own way of visiting.

Both felt the Museum presented itself as a place for adults. In travelling between Discovery Areas in the British Galleries one family came across a study area with books. The little girl asked to stop and look at the books. The mother responded they would all be for grown ups. In fact the little girl stopped anyway and pulled a child's book from the shelf and the mother conceded she was surprised. The non-visitor mother only seemed to relax in the courtyard garden where she felt the children could be themselves.

Two small children's chairs in the study area would have signalled clearly to families that they would find something here for them (and of course making sure there were books for children there too).

Whilst the second family identified the Discovery Areas as a positive part of their visit, the first mother could think of nothing that had been good about the visit. The second mother said: "I'm one on one, so I'm fine to do things with her. If you have more than one child it's more difficult. Building the Crystal Palace is the only thing she's been able to do independently."

Physical access and the distances children need to walk are issues for families. One accompanied family had a buggy, but the little boy preferred to walk much of the time, meaning the mother had to carry the buggy up and down stairs. They did not use a lift, although they did use ramps. The amount of walking would have been unlikely to be such an issue if the family adults had felt they knew where they were going and had not had to re-trace steps. Better navigation and orientation information would have helped.

Overall new visitors, and especially traditional non-visitors, would be likely to find a visit to the Museum hard work with young children on a day when no Activity Cart is available.

## **8.5 observations on the Activity Cart**

As an associated part of this study, the evaluator noted some observations about the workings of the Activity Cart with families with young children. These are listed as a series of bullet points below.

- the Cart provides a chance for families to orientate themselves, decide where they will go next and plan their visit. This is especially so when so many families come to the Cart as their first stop. This orientation function of the cart could be more formalised, perhaps through a separate stand with leaflets or a board with suggestions. This would also give the team the opportunity to promote the idea of combining visits with other South Kensington museums or providing a takeaway list of London venues with something to offer under 5s. The other Kensington museums might be prepared to reciprocate. If they did, the V & A might expect to attract new visitors as well as more repeat visits.
- some families still find the Cart in passing and others need to know where it is. The position of the Cart in galleries should be reviewed. The Cart should be visible from the entrance. In an ideal world it should be signed from any gallery entrance using an A frame style sign, including an arrow indicating where the Cart is.
- the area round the Cart needs to be better defined and more comfortable. The blocks brought out for the evaluation proved useful for families to sit or work on. Floor cushions or floor mats might also work. There are some safety issues in some of the spaces. The Cart and "furniture" should be positioned to minimise risk.
- the activities are too complex for young children. Where they were engaged they were either decorating pre-made things (made by parents) or making their own unrelated thing using the Cart's materials. This open-ended creative use of the materials could be formalised and encouraged for very young children. Alternatively, children between 3 and 5 could have the option of having pre-cut templates or pre-made headdresses for example, that they could spend time decorating. For the very able under 5s, the chance to make their own would still be available. This would however cut down on the number of parents making

Indian arm bands or helmets! One parent who comes regularly even commented that some parents become competitive with other parents. Since some parents seemed to enjoy the cutting out, it would be good to offer things for parents to do if they want to. This could be making their own thing, or potentially some of the activities could be for families to do together. However family activities should involve all the family all the time, not the parents cutting and sticking, then the children decorating.

- given that many children under 5 have older siblings for whom the Activity Cart is fine, the Cart could offer parallel activities for younger children. This might include some pretend play toys or some picture books. There could be themed discovery boxes for under 5s, which they can play with whilst their siblings make. These could then still be linked to the galleries as the Cart is.
- the links between the Cart's activities and the displays is designed in but many families don't seem to make much of it. Some cart staff point out the link and encourage parents to look around, but this varies between staff and also tends to be lost at busy times. The instructions refer to this, but seem to be overlooked. This aspect of the activities needs to be addressed. In some exhibitions it may be possible to send families to sit in front of particular exhibits to do particular linked activities. Laminated photos of the relevant objects or displays could be included into the instructions, given to parents with materials or be on display. A "find these" trail could be used where the first thing children do at the Cart is take a picture clue card and find all the objects featured in the activities. If they do this they could be given a sticker related to the gallery.
- whilst many activities produce things to wear there is no mirror for children to see themselves in their new item. A mirror would also provide an activity for babies.
- many parents with all children under 5, use the Cart as a chance to spilt up and re-convene. This can be one parent staying with children whilst the other gets an adult look around or parents working one on one, perhaps with one parent walking a baby around or feeding a baby.
- whilst most parents don't expect anything for babies, providing something for them at the Activity Cart would not only exceed parent expectations but make their life a lot easier. The majority of those that were asked welcomed the idea of a baby den or safe play space for babies. This could simply be a padded activity mat that parents can "borrow" from the activity cart. The baby could then be put on the floor in a safe corner and the parent would be free to help the older child with their making. At its simplest this could be an off the shelf purchase that would be CE marked and easy to wash etc. However, things for babies to experience could also be developed to fit with the Museum's remit, for example a mobile that links with the gallery theme or a laying or crawling rug that used interesting textures (for the baby) but linked in some way visually to the gallery, so that parents could comment or look at it.

## Appendix 1

### Face to face interviews

- 1 How old are the children in your family/group?
- 2 What made you decide to come to the V and A today?
- 3 Have you been to the Museum before? (Do you come regularly, often?) Have you been to other museums?
- 4 How did you find out about this activity?
- 5 What have you done/ Where have you been in the Museum so far today?
- 6 Has anything surprised you about your visit so far?
- 7 Where might you be going after this?
- 8 What have your children under 5 enjoyed most in the Museum? What have you enjoyed most as a family?
- 9 Would you recommend the Museum to families you know that have children under 5?

Yes                      No                      Don't Know

Can you explain your answer?

The Museum is considering how it could better provide for children under 5. Can I ask you to give marks out of 5 for the following, where 5 out of 5 is brilliant and 1 out of 5 is terrible.

- 10 How important is it to have things for children under 5 to do?  
1☹      2      3      4      5😊                      Don't know
- 11 How good for children under 5 are the Museum's current activities?  
1☹      2      3      4      5😊                      Don't know

Can you suggest any ways in which they could be improved?

12 How interested would your family be in the following:

    dressing up, puppets or pretend play in some exhibitions

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    simple card or board games linked to objects

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    safe play pen/baby activity den type areas for children under 2

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    make and take away art activities that you use yourselves

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    picture story books and information books linked to objects

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    historical things to touch and handle

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    Museum staff led activity sessions

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

    any other kind of toy or activity

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

13 What kinds of activities have you enjoyed in other museums, if you have visited?

14 How good for children under 5 are the Museum's practical facilities?

1☹    2    3    4    5☺    Don't know

Can you suggest any ways in which they could be improved?

15 What one thing would you advise the Museum to do that would make the biggest improvement for families with children under 5?

Thank you very much for your time. The information you've given us is anonymous, but it would help us if you could just give us a few facts about yourself and your family.

- a) Parent                      Grandparent                      Carer                      Other
- b) Number of adults in group: M                      F
- c) Girls in group .....                      Boys in group .....
- d) Do you live in London                      rest of UK                      outside the UK

Date:                      Time                      Activity/location