

“One banker’s bonus could keep a museum going for years”

Our reporters
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A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to some of those people visiting the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Manchester. MOSI was first opened in 1969 as the North Western Museum of Science and Industry and plays an important role in the cultural and educational life of the city. It has occupied its present historic site in the Castlefield Urban Heritage Park, which includes five listed buildings, since 1975. The area of Castlefield was the cradle of the city’s 18th and 19th century industrial revolution.

The site and museum includes the former Liverpool Road Station, which was the Manchester terminus of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. This was the world's oldest passenger station, first opened in 1830. Also on exhibition at MOSI is an identical replica of the world's first stored programme computer, the Small Scale Experimental Machine, more popularly known as the Baby, which was built at Manchester University in 1948. With an average of around 700,000 visitors a years, MOSI is the most visited “non-national” museum in England, outside of London

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is to end its funding of eight of the so-called “non-national” museums from 2015. One of these is MOSI and the cut in its current “grant-in-aid” will result in a £1 million reduction in income over the four-year period to 2015. The museum could lose up to 79 percent of its funding. A government spokesman recently said that MOSI should look to other sources of funding in order to have a “sustainable future”. The spokesman added, “We are now exploring whether the department's non-national museums may be more effectively sponsored through other bodies or programmes in the longer term”.

Another “non-national” museum in the city is the

People’s History Museum. At present 70 percent of the costs of the People’s History Museum are met by the Department of Culture, Media & Sport, Manchester City Council, and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

Katy Archer, director of the People's History Museum, said in November that the loss of government funding, “may have an impact on our policy towards [free] admissions. We haven't had a conversation about that yet—but it means that we're going to have to look elsewhere for sources of funding if that funding no longer exists in 2015.”

The cuts to these important museums are taking place alongside £109 million in cuts already being imposed by Manchester City Council as part of the government’s £100 billion austerity programme.

Barbara C., Petra and Barbara are from the Czech Republic and were visiting MOSI on a trip to Manchester.

Barbara C said, “Unfortunately in the Czech Republic we don’t have access to free museums. I like this idea because if I don’t have any money and I decide to go to a museum and I can go to do it for free. It is a part of history and we are just curious to see it.”

Petra said, “This is part of history and of culture and so it should be open and be free to use. The government should pay for it.”

Paul Brown is from Bolton in Greater Manchester and has just retired. He said “I use museums as they are free. Over the holiday period when you’ve got grandchildren, its gets expensive when you’re a pensioner. I go to a few museums. We go to the one in Bolton too.

“If I was balancing the books, I would put the money more into health care, not cutting these things. It’s the same in Bolton. They are closing half the libraries, it’s all connected. But if you look at the bankers, they are now doing very well and are better off.”

Victor Baldwin is from Halifax in West Yorkshire and was visiting the museum for the first time with his granddaughter. He said, “I do go to museums if I get a chance. They closed down the wool history museum in Halifax about five years ago. I thought it was a popular place and they just closed it.

“Everyone is being cut, even lollypop ladies [school crossing patrol officers] and I think it’s disgusting. And now you’ve got all these bankers getting big bonuses. One banker’s bonuses could keep one of these going for a year or two. I agree that this is depriving everyone of education and access to culture.”

Emily, whose partner works at MOSI, said, “I think it should stay free. It’s good for families and it’s something for people to do. My boyfriend works here in the restaurant. I’ve been here before with my brother and he liked it. And the exhibitions change too so you can keep learning. If it loses money, they will charge for it and then no-one will come to it.”



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