

Diversity drive at heritage sites 'was a waste of cash'

TARGETS to increase the diversity of visitors to castles, abbeys and stately homes were described as a waste of money last night.

The Commons public accounts committee said a Government drive to increase the number of ethnic minority, disabled and poor people at historic sites had been so badly run it posed 'serious risks to value for money'.

English Heritage, which manages more than 400 ancient monuments, was set a series of diversity targets five years ago as a condition of its £125million-a-year budget.

But MPs found the targets had made little impact on the type of people visiting historic sites.

Edward Leigh, the Tory chairman of the committee, described them as 'unrealistic' and said neither ministers nor officials at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport appeared to have any idea how to achieve them.

Mr Leigh said: 'The proportion of the UK population visiting historic sites is already some 70 per cent, an impressive total, and most of the people who don't visit say that they are not interested in doing so.'

'It is hard to see what useful purpose was achieved by setting targets to increase visits from this or that under-represented group.'

The targets have since been quietly dropped.



‘Pointless’ push to attract minorities to historic sites

**By Stephen Adams
Arts Correspondent**

AN INITIATIVE to encourage more people from minorities to visit historic sites has been pointless, MPs have said.

English Heritage was set “unrealistic targets” to attract more ethnic minorities, poorer people and those with disabilities, according to a report by the Commons’ public accounts committee.

The MPs said the government project was poorly conceived because most people visited historic sites of their own accord and trying to convince those who had no interest was likely to

fail. Edward Leigh, the committee chairman, said: “The proportion of the UK population visiting historic sites is already some 70 per cent, an impressive total, and most of the people who don’t visit say that they are not interested in doing so.

“It is hard to see what useful purpose was achieved by setting targets to increase visits from this or that under-represented group.”

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport met its aim for the number of people from black and ethnic minority groups visiting historic sites between 2005 and 2008. But it failed to

attract enough people from lower socio-economic groups or those with disabilities.

Mr Leigh, a Conservative MP, criticised how the project was set up, saying there was “no way of measuring the impact” of actions to bring in people from those groups.

He said: “There was no point in the department setting targets to widen participation when it did not know how achievable they were.”

A department spokesman said it continued to set “realistic targets” when making investment decisions to get more people to take part in culture and sport.



Heritage site visitor targets 'pointless'

Polly Curtis
Whitehall correspondent

Targets to increase the number of black, disabled and economically disadvantaged people who visit England's historical attractions are today branded "pointless" by MPs. The public accounts committee said that three key 2008 targets - of which all but one were missed - were unrealistic and set without any plan for how they would be achieved.

The committee's report criticises the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's strategy, arguing that 70% of people visit historical sites and citing polls suggesting that the other 30% choose not to.

English Heritage, the main agency responsible for delivering the targets to increase the proportion of visitors who are from ethnic minorities, poorer homes or have a disability, failed to measure whether its efforts were even affecting the rates of visitors, it says.

The report also raises concerns about a 20% decline in the number of school children visiting English Heritage sites.

Cuts to English Heritage's £125m annual budget have forced the agency to focus more on its money-making ventures than its public role, it claims.

The Tory MP Edward Leigh, chairman of the committee, said: "It is hard to see what useful purpose was achieved by setting targets to increase visits from this or that under-represented group."

The DCMS said: "We welcome the committee's recognition of the continuing high level of heritage participation in this country. The department believes that value for money is really important when investment decisions are taken. That is why realistic targets continue to be set for our objective to get more people participating across culture and sport."



Access to heritage still denied

Audit office report identifies weaknesses with policies and targets

Felicity Heywood

A "weak link" between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) policy objectives to broaden participation, and the targets agreed with English Heritage, has resulted in only small increases in the number of people from underrepresented groups visiting the historic environment (see table).

A report from the National Audit Office (NAO), entitled *Promoting Participation with the Historic Environment*, found that although there were increases in visitors from ethnic minorities, lower socio-economic groups and those with a limiting disability – the target (achieving at least a 3 percentage point rise between 2005-06 and 2007-08) was met only in the first group.

Although it manages only 5 per cent of England's historic sites, the report says that as a government-sponsored department, English Heritage has a remit to influence the wider sector by promoting and spreading good practice.

But the NAO concludes that it is unclear to what extent the actions of DCMS or English Heritage made

a difference to the rise in the ethnic minority visitor figures. Indeed, English Heritage was unable to confirm whether its Sites of Memory research project for the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 2007, had any bearing on the increase in these figures.

English Heritage says it had not been asked to measure the diversity of visitors to its properties. Instead, it agreed with DCMS to become a partner in the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's Taking Part Survey, which measures the public's behaviour and attitude towards heritage sites.

The report also notes that English Heritage faced financial pressures that led it to focus on maximising revenue. This consequently compromised its decisions on how to broaden participation with the historic environment.

The DCMS said it was "regrettable" that some targets were missed, but overall, the performance of the heritage sector was good.

As a government-funded body, English Heritage divides visitors into categories. But many heritage and historic environment organisations fail to do so, including the National Trust,

National Trust Scotland, Historic Scotland and the Welsh Assembly's historic environment service, Cadw.

Some record figures for visitors with a disability, as they pay a separate entry fee. Although each organisation's website may boast that its properties are broadening access and have facilities for everyone, they then fail to evaluate how well they are doing.

A lack of resources may contribute to these organisations' reluctance to invest in monitoring visitors' use of their sites. Why collect categorised figures when there are limited resources to do anything about the information gained?

Judy Ling Wong, UK director of the Black Environment Network, which consults with heritage organisations to increase inclusivity, says she can understand that viewpoint. She worked with the National Trust to launch a diversity policy in 2006. When the policy was introduced, those who really wanted change used it to their benefit, says Ling Wong.

The National Trust welcomes 12 million people annually to its 300-plus historic house and gardens and 49 industrial monuments and mills. Head of access-for-all, Heather Smith, says the

organisation is re-evaluating the way in which it monitors visitors by asking whether its on-site questionnaires are effective and using its Midlands-based Whose Story project as a pilot for monitoring particular groups.

Ling Wong says that until organisations start properly monitoring visitors, rather than being purely "gestural", things won't change much. She says the ultimate measure is the Visit Britain model, where visitors are recorded on the same day year on year.

Progress should be made in November, when a parliamentary committee hearing will give English Heritage and the department for culture a chance to present their positions on the issues raised by the NAO report.

NAO recommendations

- As a matter of urgency, DCMS and English Heritage to agree clear and relevant measures to assess English Heritage's performance
- English Heritage should benchmark the cost and impact of its outreach activities against similar organisations
- English Heritage should profile the communities around its properties and produce an action plan for each to raise levels of engagement

Visitors to historic sites (DCMS Taking Part Survey)

Priority Group	% Increase/ (decrease)	Statistically significant increase	Target met
Black and minority ethnic	3.4	Yes	Yes
Limiting disability	1.5	No	No
Lower socio-economic group	2.3	Yes	No

Source: Taking Part December 2008. Note: the increase/decrease is between the 2005-06 and 2007-08 results

