

Measuring Social and Cultural Infrastructure

– Guidance for Central Government



Social and cultural infrastructure plays a critical, yet often unnoticed, role in the lives of communities. Despite the concept(s) gaining traction in policy and research circles in recent years, until now there has been no consistent approach to measuring it. Funded by the British Academy, this project develops a novel approach to the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure.

This guidance outlines the framework and why it is useful for central government. It also provides a theoretical example of how central government could use the framework, though we encourage all users to use the framework in a way that is tailored to their priorities and context.

Why is the framework useful for central government?

Our framework offers central government a valuable tool to achieve a deeper understanding of social and cultural infrastructure, enabling **more informed decisions about where to invest and how to compare places.**

The framework could **contribute to a range of policy areas**, including DCMS's civil Society Covenant Framework, MHCLG's Plan for Neighbourhoods, and the proposed new towns.

Despite working on a national scale, central government can use the framework to gain a contextual understanding of social and cultural provision:

- Initially, this may involve **gathering quantitative data to identify regions** with below-average levels of social and cultural infrastructure.
- A second iteration of the measurement process, focused on **local insights**, would then be used to understand on-the-ground experiences and needs.
- **A dual top-down and bottom-up approach** would provide an accurate and actionable basis for developing interventions that are relevant and effective.

Key points of the framework

Social and cultural infrastructure *is* infrastructure.

We propose a characteristics-based approach grounded in the theory and language of infrastructure. This approach involves asking three key questions:

- Is the entity being measured an asset?
- Does it function as infrastructure?
- Is it social and cultural in character?

Measurement is a process.

We have developed a unique measurement framework, which involves three phases:

- Phase 1 involves asking why we are measuring and what we will do with the results.
- Phase 2 moves to identifying and measuring the 'stock' of social and cultural infrastructure and its usage.
- Phase 3 encourages stakeholders to present and analyse the evidence collected in dynamic and creative ways that facilitate action.

Strengths of the framework

We believe our approach possesses a number of strengths:

1. It encourages stakeholders to think about how social and cultural assets **interact with other types of infrastructure.**
2. It ensures **greater transparency** with regards to the measurement process and decisions taken as a consequence.
3. It is **flexible** in that it enables anyone to use it, regardless of their purpose, and allows its users to determine the assets under consideration.
4. It encourages a **wide range of data and views** to be taken into account, from national perspectives to community voices.

Case Study: Central Government

1. Who is measuring and why?

Central government has decided to make **access to museums a key policy priority** as part of its broader culture strategy. DCMS starts a project to **investigate the state of museums in England** to help them to develop a museums policy and investment strategy.

2.a Identifying social and cultural infrastructure

Initially, the project team decides to focus on **accredited museums**. However, having started the measurement process, they discover that **unaccredited museums make up a significant proportion**, so decide to include these as well.

2.b Measuring provision

To understand the provision of museums across England, the team uses the **Mapping Museums database** and **NESTA's interactive map** of accredited museums. It maps museums against ONS population data and IMD data to identify **which local authorities have both a low density of museums and high levels of deprivation**.

2.c Measuring use and access

The team chooses **ten local authorities** with few museums and high levels of deprivation to do a **deep dive into the role of museums in each area**. Working with each local authority, the team uses:

- **Resident surveys** asking how often they visit museums and the impact of museums on their wellbeing and civic pride
- **Interviews** with museum staff and volunteers
- Museums' **administrative data** regarding the cost of entry, numbers and demographics of users, the activities they run, their income and expenditure, and online presence

The team also looks at **public transport information** to explore the physical accessibility of the museums.

3. Analysis and decision-making

For each local authority, the team creates an **interactive map** of the museums and local transport systems, which is accompanied by quotes from the interviews and surveys. The team also produces a **report of their findings** from each area.

They recommend that:

- **More revenue (rather than capital funding)** be provided for museums.
- DCMS should **work more closely with the government's relevant ALBs and other national funders** to support existing and new museums in areas of most need.
- **More guidance and resources** be provided to help unaccredited museums achieve accreditation so they can access more funding sources, attract donations, and develop their local services.