



## Free admission to state museums

In February 2016, free admission was introduced to a total of 18 state museums with the aim of increasing museum visits and also attracting new visitors to museums. To compensate the museums for the loss of revenue, the Government allocated an annual appropriation of SEK 80 million.

Free admission to state museums is one of the major reforms in the field of culture and is of great importance for the public activities of museums. However, museums also have other tasks, such as knowledge building, collections management, cooperation and dissemination across the country. The implementation of the reform by museums and its impact on their overall activities has not been evaluated previously. It is in this context that the Swedish National Audit Office has now audited the free-admission reform.

The audit answers three questions:

- Has the Government created sufficient conditions for the implementation of the reform?
- Have the museums implemented the reform effectively?
- Has the reform affected the ability of museums to carry out their main tasks?

### Audit findings

Free admission has increased museum visits. Free admission also provides good conditions for reaching out to those who otherwise would not have visited these museums. However, the Swedish NAO's audit shows that the purpose and objectives of free admission are perceived as unclear by the museums. This has implications both for implementation of the reform by the museums and for meaningful follow-up.

In order for free admission to function effectively as a tool to encourage museum visits in the future, there is a need to clarify governance and develop follow-up. Otherwise, the reform could have a negative impact on the activities of museums. This responsibility rests with both the Government and the relevant museum agencies. In particular, the Government and museums need to develop a common understanding of how museum visits should be followed up in a meaningful way.

The Swedish NAO assesses that the museums have carried out the reform effectively, given the conditions set by the Government. They have taken steps to be able to offer a good experience to both greater numbers of and new visitors. They have adapted the infrastructure of museums and have worked to ensure that all visitors, regardless of who they are, receive good treatment and are able to benefit from the museums' content according to their different circumstances and preferences.

Museums work in slightly different ways with free admission to broaden their audience, in terms of both focus and scope. There are a number of good examples in the audit of how museums can do this. At the same time, the Swedish NAO is of the opinion that certain museum agencies could work even more strategically with free admission to broaden their audience.

The Swedish NAO considers that the reform has affected the ability of museums to carry out their main tasks. To what extent and in what way varies between the tasks and between the different museums. The public activities in general have been positively affected by the reform. The museums also seem to agree that reaching new audiences is facilitated by free admission. The major challenge of free admission, as far as the public activities are concerned, is to combine the increased visitor pressure with continued high quality in the individual museum visit.

The free admission reform has changed the conditions for museums to finance their activities. For some museums, the transition to free admission has not posed any real economic challenges. Others find it more difficult to balance the books. Opportunities to generate revenue to cover existing needs are limited and vary between museums. Ultimately, the economic challenges risk having a negative impact on the ability of museums to maintain a high standard when fulfilling their various tasks.

## Recommendations

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations to the Government and the museum agencies.

To the Government:

- Clarify the purpose and objectives of free admission.
- Develop a follow-up of free admission that addresses the information needs of both the Government and the museums. The forms of follow-up should be developed in consultation with the relevant museum agencies.
- Ensure that free admission does not have a negative impact on the museums' ability to carry out their main tasks.

To the museum agencies:

- Develop the work on free admission as a tool to reach new visitors.