



The Next Chapter Project Evaluation Report September 2022 to April 2025



Executive Summary March 2025
Diana Moore & Dr Samantha Peters

Executive Summary

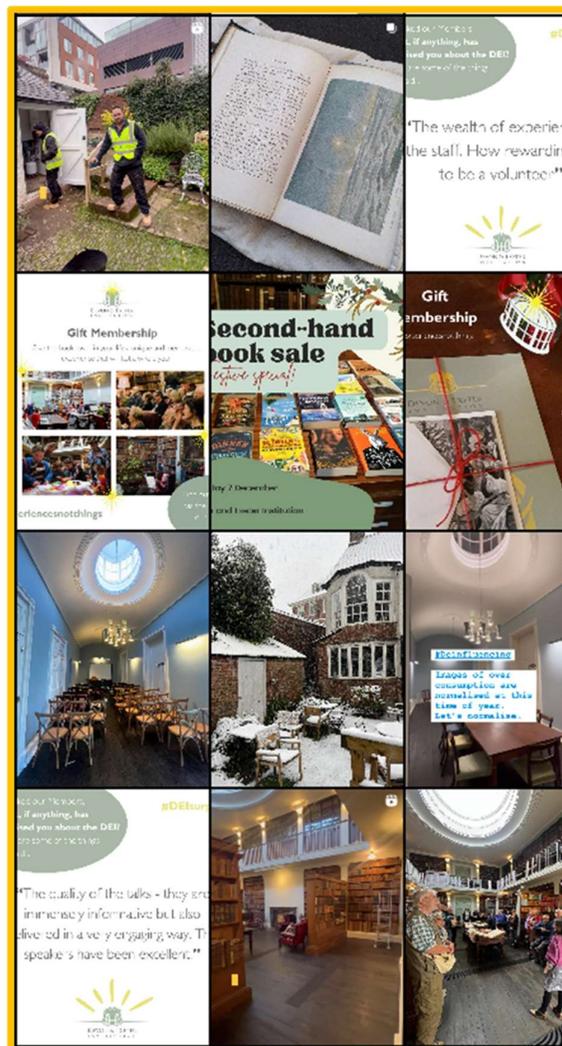
The Devon and Exeter Institution (DEI) was established in 1813 and has been located at 7 Cathedral Close, Exeter since 1814. DEI is proud of its spirit of enquiry ethos which has prevailed since the Enlightenment over 200 years ago and continues up until today. The library is managed as a living resource: using its stories underpin a dynamic and inclusive programme of events, including lectures, workshops, and temporary exhibitions.

This report covers the evaluation of The Devon and Exeter Institution's Next Chapter Project, which ran from January 2022 to March 2025, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). This evaluation was undertaken over the course of the delivery phase, from September 2022 to April 2025 by Diana Moore and Dr Samantha Peters, independent consultants, with experience of leading and managing charitable and not for profit organisations. The evaluation followed an "outcome led" approach, intended to give a holistic insight into the project's impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Our Findings

The evaluation yielded a number of findings about the project, its impact, and success in delivering its intended aims.

The Institution is involving a wider range of people. The renovations to the building have opened-up access and, this is being warmly welcomed. Audiences have grown, with a diverse programme, and new membership categories reaching new groups. People are coming through the doors with a broader profile. Many more are engaging with the Institution through digital means. Moreover, the new more flexible education spaces will allow for a wider range of groups and organisations to engage with the Institution and its work longer-term.



The Lessons Learned

Certain factors emerged as learning from the Project which could be used to shape the future success of the Institution. In this regard, we believe that:



1. Continuing with new membership categories, such as those for people on low incomes, and offering a diverse range of both intellectual, cultural, and practical activities for all ages will, over time, further extend the reach of the Institution, and broaden its audiences.

2. There is substantial opportunity to build on its ability to attract younger audiences and extending memberships and activities for children, young people, and schools.

3. There is potential to further capitalise on the strong partnerships which the Institution has developed, while partnership working could be aided by joint grant applications.

4. There is potential for further renovation to the building, but the Institution may benefit from a period of consolidation to ensure it has captured all the benefits of the Next Chapter Project.

Our Recommendations

We have twelve recommendations to make regarding the future of the Institution.

Our recommendations which relate to its strategy and governance include:

1. Capitalising on the success and experience of the organisation in heritage leadership, and promoting the success of the project in increasing access to heritage.
2. Building on its positive and progressive mindset towards improvement, and its participatory approach to programming, to further drive engagement and widen audiences.

3. Focussing on business development in the post project phase, with planning for long- term financial resilience which fully exploits the potential for income generation provided by the new hireable spaces.
4. Capturing all the elements of trustee succession planning in a single policy showing the skills needed and how they are recruited and rotated, key roles appointed.
5. Developing a specific trustee training programme tailored to the skills needed for the post project phase.
6. Tracking the change in room users, and developing growth in room hire income as a percentage of overall income.
7. Undertaking a further disability audit to capture the extent of the impact of changes in access and continue to assess changing needs.



Our recommendations which relate to how The Devon & Exeter Institution continues to monitor and report on the impact of its work include:

1. Surveying low-income members to understand the value and attraction of this category and exploit its full potential to broaden audiences.
2. Routinely collecting demographic data for new members, so that this can be comprehensively tracked going forward. While demographic data is not available within the current membership database, we recommend capturing it for new members to track further development more easily.
3. Carrying out further 'spot' or participant surveys to ascertain how the improved access is



received by visitors longer-term, as much of the data obtained through the evaluation was obtained early in the project before the building had to close to undertake the works, to show the full impact of the change over the long term.

4. Continuing to record quantitative and qualitative feedback to inform future activities, and to use this for impact, promotional and fundraising purposes.
5. Creating a dedicated volunteer survey targeted at volunteers (both members and non-members volunteers), to gauge their needs and motivations as the organisation continues to change, and benefit from its renovations, as well as better understand the skills and learning they acquire through their involvement.

The project and this evaluation were funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Evaluators would like to thank the enthusiasm and willing participation of DEI staff, Trustees, Members, and visitors who willingly took part in this evaluation.



Made possible with

**Heritage
Fund**

The evaluation, while a requirement of the funding, will, we hope, enable all those involved in the DEI reflect on the success and learning from the project and help inform planning for the future. For further information about the report please contact Emma Dunn, DEI Director.

Images: Unless otherwise stated photographs have been supplied by or taken from the DEI's Instagram account (pages 2 & 4) and are copyright of the Devon and Exeter Institution. The pictures on page 5 are from DEI events: gardening volunteers and illustrator and author, Emma Lewis, for 'Who do you think you are?'. The word cloud on page 3 is created from feedback from project participants. The Instagram account [Instagram](#) – serves as a good record of the project key events and the reels are an excellent record of the building projects progress over time.

Diana Moore & Dr Samantha Peters
March 2025