THE NATIONAL GALLERY | NG CITIZENS





CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY REPORT



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH involve



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Gallery and Involve would like to the thank all those who have contributed to NG Citizens.

Thanks are due to the External and Internal Advisory Groups, facilitators, project team, videographer, photographer, graphic facilitator, project observers and independent evaluator. We'd also like to thank the individuals and organisations that helped by bringing their insight, experience and time to the project, and who have all been essential in delivering this landmark project for the Gallery.

Most importantly of all, we wish to thank the Assembly Members. Their dedication and commitment to NG Citizens has ensured that every voice was heard, every perspective was considered, and every decision was made with purpose. Their hard work, integrity, and collaborative spirit have been invaluable throughout this journey, and we are deeply grateful for their contributions.

We hope their work inspires you, whether you are a leader in the cultural sector or simply someone who believes public institutions should be shaped by the people they serve.

FRONT COVER
Paulus Theodorus van Brussel, *Fruit and Flowers*, 1789, Presented by Frederick John Nettlefold, 1947 © The National Gallery, London.
Paolo Uccello, Niccolò Mauruzi da Tolentino at the Battle of San Romano, probably about 1438-40, Bought, 1857 © The National Gallery, London.
LEFT
Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839, Turner Bequest, 1856, © The National Gallery, London.

Citizens' Assembly Report written and designed © 2026.
AUTHORED BY
The National Gallery and Involve.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 03
- Vision 05
- Principles 05

Understanding the Citizens' Assembly 09
- Why NG Citizens and why now? 10
- Why deliberation, not consultation? 11
- Why a Citizens' Assembly and then a Citizens' Panel? 11
- Design Choices 11
- Expertise at every stage 12
- The Calling Question 13
- The Key Challenges 14
- The Assembly's Remit 14
- Why creativity and experience ran through everything 15

Recruitment: Who took part? 17
- Diagrams 19
- Accessibility and Inclusion 23

The Process 25
- Session One 26
- Session Two 28
- Session Three 29
- Session Four 33
- Between Sessions: Expert challenge 34
- Session Five 34

The Vision and Principles 37

Phase Two: The NG Citizens' Panel 55

Appendix 59
- Project Partners 60
- Acknowledgements 60
- Glossary 63
- Full Vote 63

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The National Gallery was founded by Parliament in 1824 with a clear purpose: to make great art accessible for the "*enjoyment and education of all.*" This founding principle has remained central to the Gallery's identity, underpinning its responsibility to share the works entrusted in its care with the widest possible audiences.

Across its Bicentenary year in 2024/2025, the National Gallery renewed its commitment to this founding principle to ensure it continues to delight, inspire and educate audiences.

NG Citizens was announced in July 2025: the first national citizens' assembly by a UK museum or gallery, building on the pioneering work of regional initiatives such as Birmingham Museums Citizens' Jury. Working with a group of citizens reflective of the UK, the National Gallery sought to revisit its civic and democratic foundations, through inviting a broad range of voices to generate ideas about its future and express what mattered to them most.

Through NG Citizens, 55 people were chosen to reflect the diversity of the UK and were brought together across five sessions to learn, deliberate and build shared ideas for the future of the National Gallery. For most of the Assembly Members, this was their first time visiting or engaging with the National Gallery and its programmes.

LEFT
Vincent Van Gogh, *Sunflowers*, 1888,
Bought, Courtauld Fund, 1924
© The National Gallery, London.

They collectively responded to the overarching question posed by the National Gallery: **What do you want from the UK's National Gallery? How can it bring people and paintings together in authentic and meaningful ways, now and for the future?**

The Assembly Members gave their time, insight and creativity to support the National Gallery in shaping its programmes and priorities around the needs and aspirations of UK Citizens.

The Vision and Principles in this report are the result of this process and will help inform the delivery of the National Gallery's Audience Strategy. They have been presented to the Gallery's Director Sir Gabriele Finaldi, Executive Committee, and all staff, to continue to build collective ownership.

The National Gallery will continue to be in dialogue with Assembly Members beyond the completion of the Assembly phase, through the Citizens' Panel. The Vision and Principles will set the agenda for the second phase of the project. Over the next four years, a series of smaller Panels, made up of Assembly Members, will work directly with the Gallery to oversee the implementation of these ideas.

It is hoped that the project not only supports the Gallery to meet the needs of its audiences but also demonstrates the value of cultural organisations entering into dialogue with those they serve, to ensure they reflect and respond to their audiences.

The Vision and Principles presented in this report are in Assembly Members' own words and are the product of the sessions.

VISION

The vision is a clear statement of what Assembly Members would like the Gallery to become. It offers a shared direction to work towards.

The UK's National Gallery belongs to the nation and welcomes everyone free of charge. The collection, through unique experiences of storytelling and human connection, is relevant to all ages.

The Gallery provides spaces for all people to engage with the paintings in a variety of ways, including new technologies. Through regional partnerships, digital access, and public decision making, the Collection reaches the whole nation.

The Gallery is inclusive and represents all of us; a place where people feel a sense of belonging, connection and inspiration.

PRINCIPLES

The principles are the core values that guide how the Gallery can move towards the vision. They shape decisions and help ensure every choice supports the vision.

The principles are presented in order of how they were prioritised out of an original 21 principles generated by the Assembly, with Principle 1 receiving the most votes.

Principle 1: **Human Stories**	The National Gallery should tell the human stories of the paintings, their creation and history, and their life since joining the Collection to facilitate visitors making their own meaningful stories.	*Principle 5:* **Public Ownership and Hidden Stories**	The National Gallery should embrace the pioneering history of being a public owned institution and surface the diverse history hidden in its vast collection.
Principle 2: **Diverse Audiences**	The National Gallery has a social responsibility to provide help and encouragement where needed to invite a diverse audience representative of the UK to meaningfully engage with its paintings.	*Principle 6:* **Personalisation and Technology**	The National Gallery should use technology to support a personalised itinerary, especially targeted at under represented groups, both remotely before visiting and on arrival.
Principle 3: **Bold Decision Making**	The National Gallery should be bold, brave and future thinking in its changes regarding curatorial, programmes, decision making and art selection to ensure it represents the width and diversity of the UK.	*Principle 7:* **UK-wide Partnerships**	The National Gallery should work in collaboration with partners and communities across the four nations, through sharing paintings and resources to reflect public ownership.
Principle 4: **Commercial Opportunities**	The National Gallery needs to embrace and grow commercial opportunities to be able to continue their existing, and invest in new, inclusive programmes to reach new and diverse audiences.	*Principle 8:* **Collection Reflects the UK**	The Collection urgently needs to be a true reflection of the UK: its history, stories, artists and people, through new acquisitions and in updating how the current collection is presented to the public.

THE ASSEMBLY IN THE WORDS OF MEMBERS

It's been a fantastic experience and I feel very privileged to have taken part, and play the tiniest part in the National Gallery's story. Thank you to everyone involved for giving me this opportunity.

ON THIS PAGE
Photos of the participants at the sessions.



I felt honoured to take part in the process which I found well organised and supportive. The broad mix of participants was well managed and I suspect we all learned. I will continue to be an advocate for NG and the Citizens Assembly process.



**As an insurance against Assembly Members being unable to attend any sessions during the project, 55 Assembly Members were selected, resulting in there being at least 50 Members at each session throughout the Assembly process.*



It has been a truly positive and enriching experience so far. I've felt welcomed, heard, and valued throughout the process, and I appreciate the organisers' commitment to inclusivity and meaningful public engagement. I look forward to continuing to contribute and seeing the impact of our work.

THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY PROFILE

50 core Assembly Members*

5 sessions

28 individual hours of learning and deliberation

1,540 collective hours of learning and deliberation

22 internal and external speakers

Guided by internal and external advisory groups

6 experiential tours of the Gallery

One Vision & **Eight** Principles

UNDERSTANDING THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY



WHY NG CITIZENS AND WHY NOW?

The National Gallery's 2,400 paintings are held in trust for the nation. Through its permanent collection, exhibitions, national touring programmes, learning initiatives and digital projects, the Gallery engages a broad range of audiences. Its Bicentenary celebrations reaffirmed its commitment to public service, which was central to its foundation by Act of Parliament in 1824.

The National Gallery has a history of collaboration with its audiences. Recent examples include the co-design of the Roden Centre for Creative Learning with its primary users: school children, teachers and community groups, and the development of its augmented reality project, The Keeper of Paintings, with children's advisory groups, families and schools across the UK. NG Citizens builds on this by further exploring the relationship between a national institution and the public whose collection it stewards.

NG Citizens grew directly from the National Gallery's Audience Strategy to deepen its relationship with domestic audiences, to ensure the Gallery moves through its third century as a dynamic, responsive and inclusive institution. By working directly with a group reflective of the UK population, the Gallery sought to explore the potential roles it can play in meeting the needs and aspirations of audiences, now and in the future.

The structure of a Citizens' Assembly has surfaced key challenges, questions and opportunities that audiences feel the National Gallery should prioritise through its future development.

LEFT AND RIGHT
Photos of the participants at the sessions.

The commitment and level of engagement from Assembly Members has shown the value that UK citizens hold in publicly funded cultural institutions, and the key role they continue to play in public life. More than 50 Assembly Members attended each session throughout.



WHY DELIBERATION, NOT CONSULTATION?

Public consultation asks people what they think. Deliberation asks people to think together. Deliberation gives people the time, information, and space to sit with ideas, examine their own assumptions, and engage with perspectives and experiences different from their own. Through using deliberation, participants were able to find common ground between their differences and to disagree constructively.

WHY A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY AND THEN A CITIZENS' PANEL?

Citizens' Assemblies are recognised for their ability to effectively facilitate collective decision making. However, maintaining momentum once an Assembly concludes is a common challenge. To address this, NG Citizens takes place over five years, with the NG Citizen's Panel following the conclusion of the assembly.

The Panel will consist of three separate cohorts between 2026 and 2030. Each cohort will be made up of 15 former Assembly Members and will have three half day online sessions. They will work with the National Gallery to test ideas, monitor progress, and help bring the vision to life. This will ensure a long-term partnership between the National Gallery and the Assembly, that moves the public closer to decision making.

Over 80% of Assembly Members said they would be interested in staying part of the Panel and will be selected at random to take part. While not all Assembly Members can take part in the first Panel cohort, all Members who have expressed interest will have the opportunity to take part.

DESIGN CHOICES

The design of this Citizens' Assembly was intended to strengthen the outputs of the process. By centring the project onsite (three full day sessions out of five) we were able to immerse all Assembly Members in the atmosphere of the Gallery, show them behind the scenes and share first hand evidence. Extending the period of engagement and ensuring it was in-person was key to enabling the information download on a large and complex organisation. This enabled participants to deepen their sense of ownership over the process, make considered decisions, and subsequently create a greater impression of how this process could support real long-term change at the National Gallery.

EXPERTISE AT EVERY STAGE

NG Citizens required input from a range of both external stakeholders and National Gallery staff throughout the process. This ensured the deliberations that followed were grounded in the combined expertise of relevant professionals. These groups included: speakers; observers; external advisory group members; and internal advisory group members.

Each speaker brought their knowledge directly to the Assembly across the first three sessions and remained on hand for any follow-up questions from the Assembly Members.

Observers were also present at all in-person sessions. These representatives from a range of organisations, including the UK Government, other cultural institutions and the Gallery, had the opportunity to experience the process for themselves. Observers do not have an active role during Assembly proceedings, but are an important part of any Citizens' Assembly; they support transparency and accountability, provide independent feedback, and allow more people to understand the process and how decisions have been made.

Two Advisory Groups provided oversight of the broader process:

The Internal Advisory Group provided the National Gallery's institutional knowledge and specialisms, with Senior representation across Gallery departments including Curatorial, Learning, Exhibitions and Touring Programmes, Digital, Licensing, Brand and Commercial, Visitor Experience, Research, Communications.

The External Advisory Group brought independent perspectives on the National Gallery and provided expertise on:

- The Gallery's role - and potential future role - in serving the UK public
- Best practice in deliberative and participatory processes
- The challenges facing the arts and cultural sector today
- Representation in the arts, including improving access for historically underrepresented groups
- Citizen involvement in arts and culture and innovative audience engagement
- Organisational transformation

At the final stage of the Assembly, the two Advisory Groups were brought together to build consensus on the implementation of the principles and produce a set of recommendations for their adoption by the Gallery.



THE CALLING QUESTION

Assembly Members were brought together to respond to the question:

What do you want from the UK's National Gallery? How can it bring people and paintings together in authentic and meaningful ways, now and in the future?

This question was developed with the Internal Advisory Group through a series of facilitated conversations led by Involve. Together, we examined the challenges facing the Gallery and agreed what should be in and out of scope for the Assembly.

The External Advisory Group also contributed to the development of the scope and calling question, helping to identify the key challenges and evidence that would be most useful in helping Assembly Members respond.

Several draft questions were tested and refined until we agreed on the final version that was clear, concise, and accurately reflected the key challenges and Assembly's scope.

LEFT
Claude Monet, *The Water-Lily Pond*, 1899,
Bought, 1927 © The National Gallery, London.

THE KEY CHALLENGES

Both Advisory Groups worked to identify the core challenges facing the Gallery and the wider cultural sector.

When designing the Assembly sessions, we used these challenges to focus speaker and evidence selection for the sessions, ensuring Assembly Members had the information they needed to develop a vision and set of principles that responded directly to these issues.

Key Challenges:

- How can the National Gallery balance its role as a free public gallery whilst being commercially minded?
- What is the social value of art? How can art galleries explain and support this?
- Can art ever be open to everyone?
- Do art galleries need to adapt to new and emerging technologies? If so, how?
- What role should art galleries play as public buildings?
- Should galleries get involved in broader social issues?
- What does 'national' mean?
- How can the Gallery balance its role as a free public gallery whilst being commercially minded?

Challenges around access and representation, specifically:

- Disability and the arts
- Poverty and access to culture
- Local community engagement
- Anti-racism
- Geographic inequality
- Young people

Assembly Members explored all these key challenges through presentations and discussions, returning to them throughout each session to make sure their final ideas reflected the wider context in which the Gallery operates.

THE ASSEMBLY'S REMIT

To make sure the Assembly's work would be useful and have real impact, we agreed a clear set of guidelines with the Internal Advisory Group about what was in and out of scope before sessions began. This helped Assembly Members focus their time on the areas where they could make the biggest difference and gave confidence that the final vision and principles would be realistic and actionable.

These guidelines were shared with Assembly Members at every session.

What was in scope for the assembly:

- How to bring in new, diverse, and loyal audiences
- How to meet the needs of different communities in the UK and make the Collection more accessible to everyone
- How to implement and build on existing plans for the future of the Gallery
- The changes needed to meet the challenges of the future
- Commercial opportunities and potential future revenue models

What was out of scope for the assembly:

- Ideas that go against the Gallery's remit to share and safeguard its paintings
- Ideas that would result in significant changes to existing buildings
- Ideas that involve buying or selling paintings
- Ideas that might compromise the Gallery's role as an Arm's Length Body of the UK Government
- Ideas that are not feasible due to costs
- Ideas that do not comply with the Gallery's legal obligations e.g. GDPR, safeguarding, and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

WHY CREATIVITY AND EXPERIENCE RAN THROUGH EVERYTHING

Public participation can enable abstract discussion and verbal debate that deeply engages with audiences. In NG Citizens it was important to facilitate richer forms of engagement that could surface insight in different ways.

For example, guided tours enabled Assembly Members to gain a better understanding of the range of programmes, research and activities the gallery undertakes, its buildings and its history.

Members used modelling, drawing, and silent discussions to surface ideas that writing or speaking alone can struggle to reach. Throughout the Assembly Process, a graphic facilitator worked alongside the Assembly to bring the vision and principles to life visually.

Part of the final principles were expressed as stories, reflecting the fact that principles are living ideas rather than static rules. The stories captured meaning, emotion, and lived impact, revealing what sits behind the principles, why they matter, and what they could tangibly look like in practice.

RIGHT
Photo of the participants at the session.



RECRUITMENT WHO TOOK PART?



RIGHT
Camille Pissarro, *The Boulevard Montmartre at Night*, 1897, Bought, Courtauld Fund, 1925, © The National Gallery, London.

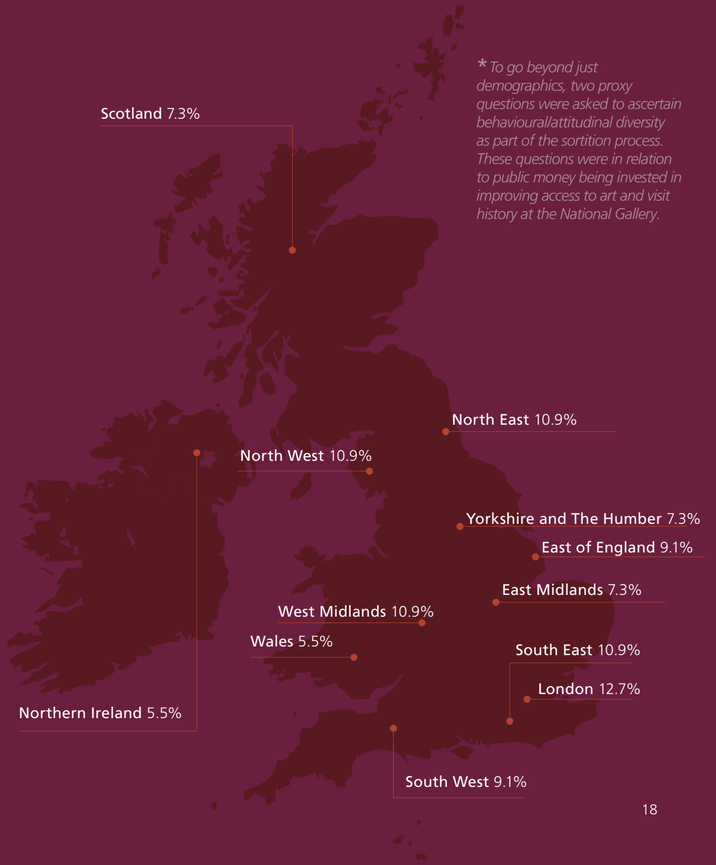
Participants were selected together with the Sortition Foundation via a civic lottery. In total, 15,000 invitations were sent to households across the four nations of the UK, and anyone living at the address could respond to the invitation through an online form.

From 246 responses, 55 participants were chosen based on the criteria below:

Gender	Geography
Age (between 16-65+)	Whether they had been to The National Gallery*
Ethnicity	
Disability	*Responses to National Gallery segmentation questions**
Occupation	

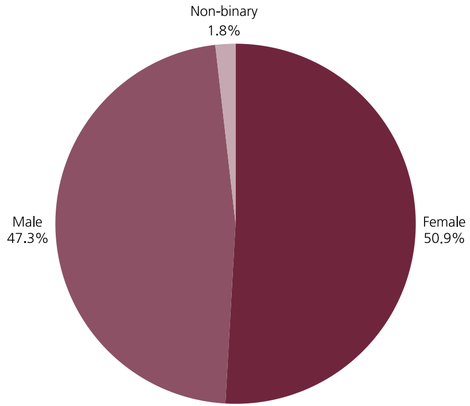
The Sortition Foundation randomly selected Assembly Members to broadly reflect the UK population. To hear from a wide diversity of people, particularly those currently underrepresented in the Gallery's audiences, we weighted recruitment towards younger people and used London's population as our benchmark for ethnic diversity.

The 15,000 letters sent to homes across the UK were weighed away from London to boost responses from people who may be less likely to have visited the National Gallery before. We also aimed to recruit three Assembly Members from each of the devolved nations. The charts in this section show the demographic spread of Assembly Members.

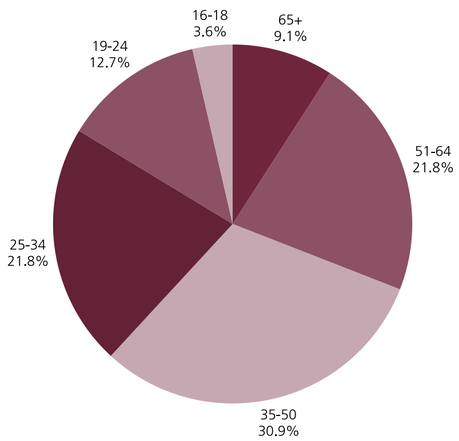


* *To go beyond just demographics, two proxy questions were asked to ascertain behavioural/attitudinal diversity as part of the sortition process. These questions were in relation to public money being invested in improving access to art and visit history at the National Gallery.*

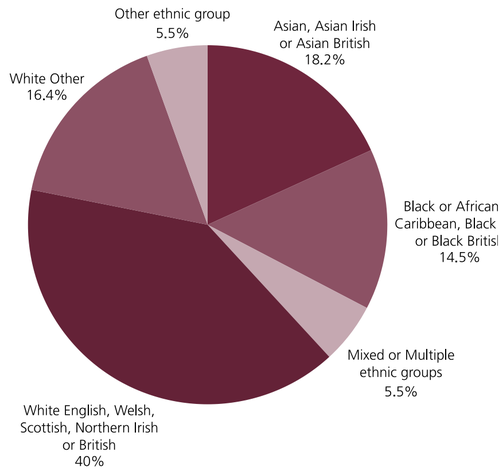
GENDER



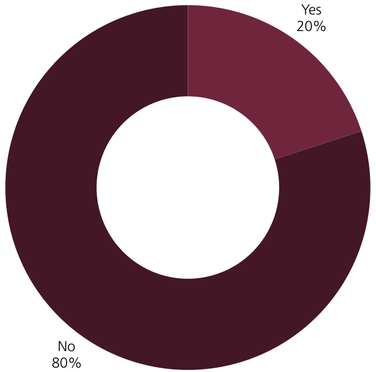
AGE



ETHNICITY



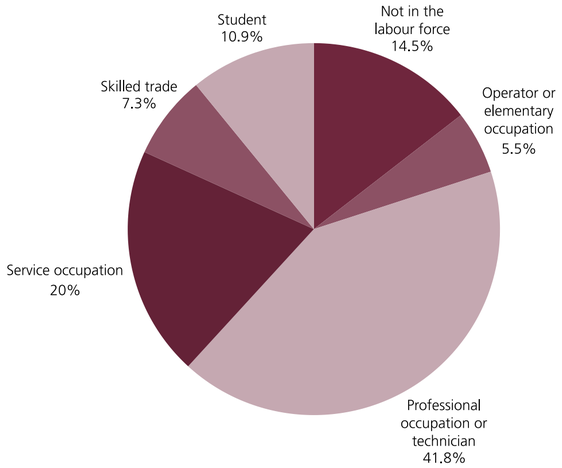
DISABILITY



BELOW
Claude Monet, *La Pointe de la Hève, Sainte-Adresse*, 1864, Purchase - 1996 © The National Gallery, London

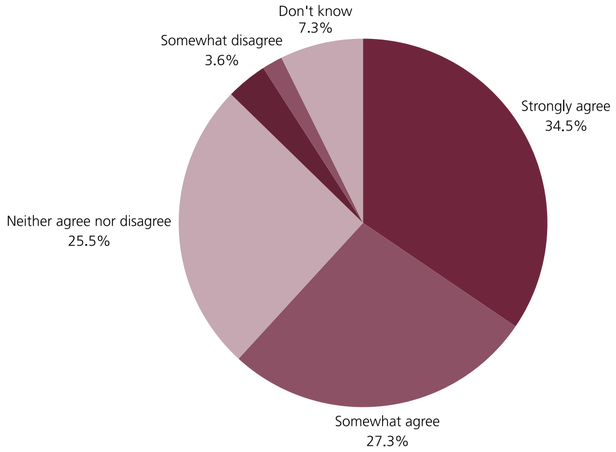


OCCUPATION



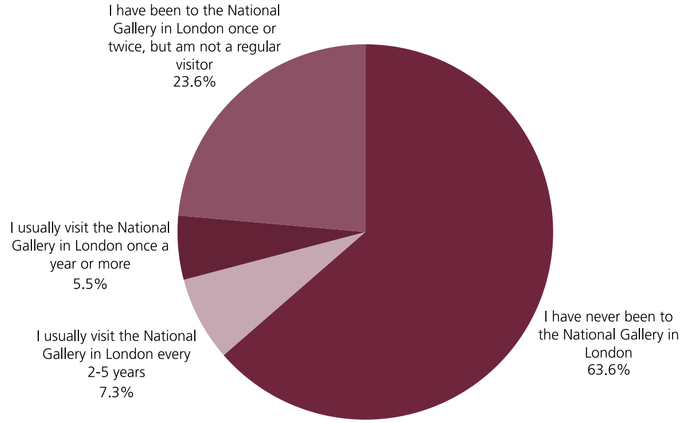
HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT?

"More public money should be invested in improving access to art."
By art we mean paintings, sculptures and installations.



BELOW AND RIGHT
Jean-Michel Cels, *Tree Study*, c.1840, Gift - 1999
© The National Gallery, London.

VISITING FREQUENCY



ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Once selected, the Involve team invited all Assembly Members to a 1-2-1 phone call. This was a chance to get to know each person and ensure everyone received the support they needed to be able to take part in the Citizens' Assembly.

Involve reimbursed all travel and subsistence costs that participants expensed to take part in the in-person sessions. They also provided additional support, including:

- Booking accommodation in London
- Pre-booking Assembly Members' travel
- Providing taxi travel to and from Assembly Sessions to accommodation
- Covering Childcare and other Care Costs
- A range of food and drink options to cover dietary requirements
- An accessible venue with step-free access to Galleries
- Access to a prayer room or quiet space during sessions
- Tailored support for Assembly Members with additional access requirements

In preparation for the online sessions, Involve sent out laptops and Wi-Fi dongles to those who needed them. Online "tech-calls" were offered to help prepare Assembly Members for participation in the online sessions.

If an Assembly Member missed a session due to unforeseen circumstances, they were offered a short "catch-up" call between each session to get them up to speed and be able to participate in the following session.

After each Assembly session, Involve sent out a feedback form to participants to gather their insights. Involve reviewed the feedback after each session to adapt and improve the process to ensure it remained accessible and enjoyable for all.

RIGHT
Photo taken in Session Five of the whole group.



Session One:
15 November
Connection, context, and visioning

Session Two:
6 December
Understanding the challenges

Session Three:
24 January
A deeper dive into the challenges and revisiting the vision

Session Four:
7 February
From ideas to Principles

Session Five:
28 March
Final Vision and Principles

THE PROCESS



SESSION ONE: CONNECTION, CONTEXT, AND VISIONING 15 NOVEMBER 2025

The first session of the Citizens' Assembly laid the foundations for NG Citizens. Fewer than half of the Assembly Members had visited the National Gallery before the project. It was therefore important to build a common understanding of the National Gallery, alongside a commitment to working well together, and an early sense of what the Gallery's future could look like.

The session opened with a welcome from the National Gallery and Involve, setting out why NG Citizens is happening, why this moment matters, and why Citizens' voices are essential to shaping the Gallery's future.

Members began by discussing art that held personal meaning to them. The room filled quickly with stories of places, people, and moments that art helped capture. It was an immediate highlight to the group that art belongs to eveyone.

From there, the groups came to agreement on how they would work well together. This was their first act of collective ownership - the group deciding together what kind of space they wanted to create.

Shared space agreement

- This isn't a space for discrimination of any kind
- Listen to others
- No such thing as a silly question or answer
- Be present
- Make it positive and fun - and not too serious
- Treat others as you want to be treated
- Disagree, but please don't be disagreeable
- Ask lots of questions to each other
- Have an open dialogue – feel able to challenge and discuss
- Confidentiality
- Respect and don't be judgmental
- Share your views and opinions

Assembly Members then began exploring the Gallery itself, not only as a collection of art but as a public institution with a civic purpose.

LEFT
Photo taken of materials during a session.

Through presentations, tours and group discussion, Assembly Members encountered the Gallery in different ways. Assembly Members heard from National Gallery staff on a range of topics including:

- The history of the National Gallery, how it is governed and funded;
- The Gallery's collection;
- The research and expertise the Gallery supports;

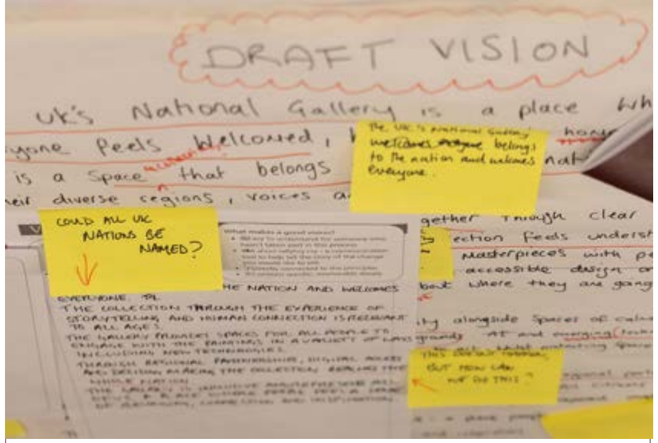
The Gallery's UK-wide engagement through Learning and Digital programmes.

From this informed position, Members were asked to imagine the National Gallery ten years from now - considering its spaces, paintings, atmosphere, stories, role in society and legacy.

Finally, Assembly Members identified the big questions they wanted to dig into next and the challenges they felt mattered most. This was an opportunity for Assembly Members to shape the agenda for Session Two. It showed what Assembly Members felt was most important to them:

- *Can art ever be open to everyone?*
- *Do galleries need to adapt to new and emerging technologies - if so, how?*
- *What is the social value of art?*

Throughout the process, all questions that could not be answered during the session were captured by the group facilitators and followed up in writing afterwards.



ABOVE Visioning and work done by participants in Session One.

"I found everyone, (organisers and participants) to be very friendly and welcoming, which was lovely! I also really enjoyed the structure of the day and the sessions as a whole. Everything was easy to understand and I can't wait to see what the other 4 sessions entail!"

"I'm pleased and honoured to be able to participate and hopefully contribute."
- Assembly Member

SESSION TWO: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES; 6 DECEMBER 2025

Session Two focused on the challenges faced by cultural institutions like the National Gallery.

This was the first online session, running for three and a half hours. The format moved between presentations, learning exercises, and small group discussions.

Assembly Members heard from leading academics on the three 'big questions' identified in Session One and had the opportunity to speak with industry experts to further develop their understanding of these areas.

In small groups, Members began connecting what they heard from the speakers to their own experience to begin answering the question: *what do we want from our National Gallery?*

With thanks to our speakers for covering these topics:

- *Can art ever be open to everyone?* - Dr Trish Scott and Professor Suzanne Macleod
- *Do galleries need to adapt to new and emerging technologies - if so, how?* - Professor Ross Parry
- *What is the social value of art?* - Professor Eleonora Belfiore

The session then turned to the Gallery's own audience data. Who visits the National Gallery? Who doesn't? What makes it easy or hard for different people to come through the doors or engage with national and digital programmes?

Assembly Members were asked to put themselves in the shoes of different types of visitors and think through the barriers and motivations for each. Josie Wood, Evaluation Manager at the National Gallery then gave an evidence-based overview of who the current domestic visitors are, with a Q&A.

Assembly Members revisited their ideas about what they want from the National Gallery, with these new perspectives, adding and adjusting their views.

The session closed with a short reflection to describe the experience of meeting online.



SESSION THREE: A DEEPER DIVE INTO THE CHALLENGES; 24 JANUARY 2026

By Session Three, the Assembly had heard from experts, explored some of the challenges facing the Gallery, and begun developing a collective vision. They wanted to take this further and help shape this session by hearing more from Gallery staff and external speakers who specialised in questions of representation and access.

Session Three brought everyone back together for guided tours of the Collection led by Curatorial staff. Several Assembly Members also took the opportunity to attend the Friday Lates event the evening before the session. This gave Members an opportunity to experience the National Gallery's extended offer and to deepen their understanding of the Collection and other Gallery spaces.

The morning continued with presentations from Gallery staff across four areas: strategy and finance; the visitor offer; collections and curation; and learning and outreach. Members had the opportunity to dig deeper into these topics by inviting speakers to their small group discussions for more detailed conversation and questions.

RIGHT The Gallery tour in Session Three.

With thanks to our National Gallery speakers:

- Jane Knowles, former Director of Public Engagement
- Simon Magill, Deputy Head of Communications
- Per Rumberg, Jacob Rothschild Head of the Curatorial Department
- Karen Eslea, Head of Learning and National Programmes

After lunch, the Assembly was joined by a group of external experts - each bringing specialist knowledge on access, inclusion and representation. Through an interactive "marketplace", Members could move freely between each stall, following their own interests, asking questions, and exploring the topics that mattered most to them.

Members returned to their small groups to reflect on what they'd heard, and how this could inform their future vision for the gallery.



With thanks to our speakers:

- Tony Heaton, Sculptor; Claire Saddleton and Sally Booth, VocalEye: *Disability and the arts.*
- Jon Sleigh, Arts Educator: *Poverty and the arts.*
- Richie Gibson, Westminster City Council: *Local communities and the arts.*
- Marlene Wylie, Creative Education Consultant: *Anti-racism and the arts.*
- Verity Babbs, Art Historian; Viktor Mikolajczyk, Slade School of Fine Art and Alumni of the National Gallery's Articulation programme: *Young people and the arts.*
- Leslie Palanker-Jermyn, South Shields Museum: *The arts outside of London.*
- Simon Magill, National Gallery: *National Gallery Audience Motivations and Barriers.*

The day closed with a creative visioning activity. Assembly Members revisited their ideas from Session One, taking into account what they had learned since, asking themselves: what values are coming through? What still needs to be said?

Assembly Members explored these ideas in small groups and then as a whole group of 50 through a silent discussion, where Assembly Members silently map their thinking on a large, shared mural. They were encouraged to think of the vision through different lenses: collections, programmes, spaces, legacy, digital, national, and decision making. This enabled a more reflective form of dialogue that surfaced connections that might otherwise have stayed hidden. The output from this exercise formed the basis of the Assembly's vision.



ABOVE The Market Stalls in Session Three.

"The marketplace sessions were a clear strength of the day. They enabled deeper, more practical exchanges between speakers and citizens and helped surface nuanced questions that were difficult to explore in the plenary format."
- Observer

"I've found the experience thoughtful, well-facilitated and genuinely engaging. There is a strong sense that citizen perspectives are being taken seriously, and the mix of formats has generally supported open and respectful discussion."
- Assembly Member





LEFT AND ABOVE
The Visioning Activity
in Session Three.

SESSION FOUR: FROM IDEAS TO PRINCIPLES; 7 FEBRUARY 2026

The Assembly Members had spent three sessions listening, questioning, exploring and experiencing. The process now moved towards deep deliberations and decision making.

This second online session had a clear purpose - to take the wealth of ideas developed so far and begin turning them into something concrete. Working from 25 clusters of ideas they had built across the first three sessions, Members reconnected with key challenges and tested their ideas against them. Did these ideas actually respond to the real pressures the Gallery faces?

Through deliberation in small groups, Members worked across all 25 ideas to identify overlaps, combine where it made sense, and engage deeper with the ideas that felt most important. During these deliberations, Assembly Members identified some ideas as 'umbrella' ideas, meaning they included or duplicated key elements of other ideas. They then merged these 'umbrella' ideas with those that sat under them, reducing the total from 25 ideas to 21. They then worked to strengthen these 21 ideas so that by the end of the session, the 21 ideas had become 21 draft principles.

These would go forward into the final session for prioritisation and development. Alongside these 21 draft principles, a draft vision began to emerge to give an overarching clarity to how the UK public would like to see the National Gallery.

"It's been excellent, really enjoyable. I love finding out more about the NG and meeting so many interesting people. Thank you for the opportunity, I'm feeling passionate about helping to make a new directive."
- Assembly Member

BETWEEN SESSIONS: EXPERT CHALLENGE; FEBRUARY - MARCH 2026

Before the final session the draft Vision from Session Three and the 21 draft principles from Session Four were reviewed by both the Internal and External Advisory Groups. They offered challenges, context, and their expertise to help strengthen the Assembly's thinking.

This was an essential step to ensure the principles were ambitious and grounded, as well as connected to the latest thinking at the Gallery and across the wider sector.

The feedback carried a clear message for Assembly Members: be bold, be radical, own your power. The vision and principles should ask for real change.

SESSION 5: THE FINAL VISION AND PRINCIPLES; 28 MARCH 2026

The final session of the Citizens' Assembly brought everything together. After months of learning, deliberating and drafting, Assembly Members arrived with their final task: to produce the Vision Statement and Principles that would guide the National Gallery's future.

The day opened with an active listening exercise - strengthening skills essential for deep deliberation. Members then moved through a marketplace of all 21 draft principles and the vision statement, each accompanied by the Advisory Groups' feedback. They used individual handbooks to take notes, move at their own pace, and focus where they wanted to.

After individual reflection came deep deliberation in small groups. Members explored each principle, asking: is this important? Will it still be important in 10 to 20 years? Does it ask the Gallery to do something genuinely new? Is it specific enough to be meaningful? Key points of consensus and disagreement were captured and shared across the whole Assembly, so every voice could inform the Assembly's thinking.

Then came the final prioritisation vote. Each Assembly Member cast eight votes for the principles they believed would best serve the Gallery's future. Eight draft principles emerged as the priority, which would then be refined. The full vote is available in the appendix.

Original Headline Statements	Number of Votes
The Gallery should tell human stories	33
The Gallery should encourage and invite under- represented, diverse audiences, with relevant and curated experiences	30
The Gallery should be brave, bold, future thinking and not confined by tradition, whilst retaining what's good about it	29
The Gallery needs to remain financially sustainable and embrace commercial opportunities both in-person and online	28
The Gallery should be more informative about its wider history, representation, and context behind the art	27
The Gallery should offer personalised experiences to create a more engaging ex-perience both at the Gallery and remotely	25
The Gallery is owned by the UK public and so it should be truly national	24
The collection should have paintings that are representative of history in an inclusive way	23

After lunch, Members self-selected which principle they wanted to develop into its final form. Each group worked to make sure each statement: stated a clear aim; explained why it mattered; and told the story of what difference it would make if it were truly alive in the Gallery's work.

Groups then shared their drafts with each other in a feedback carousel - offering constructive challenges across the whole Assembly before returning to refine their own work. The final outputs - in the Assembly Member's own words - are the Principles and Vision Statement you will find in this report.

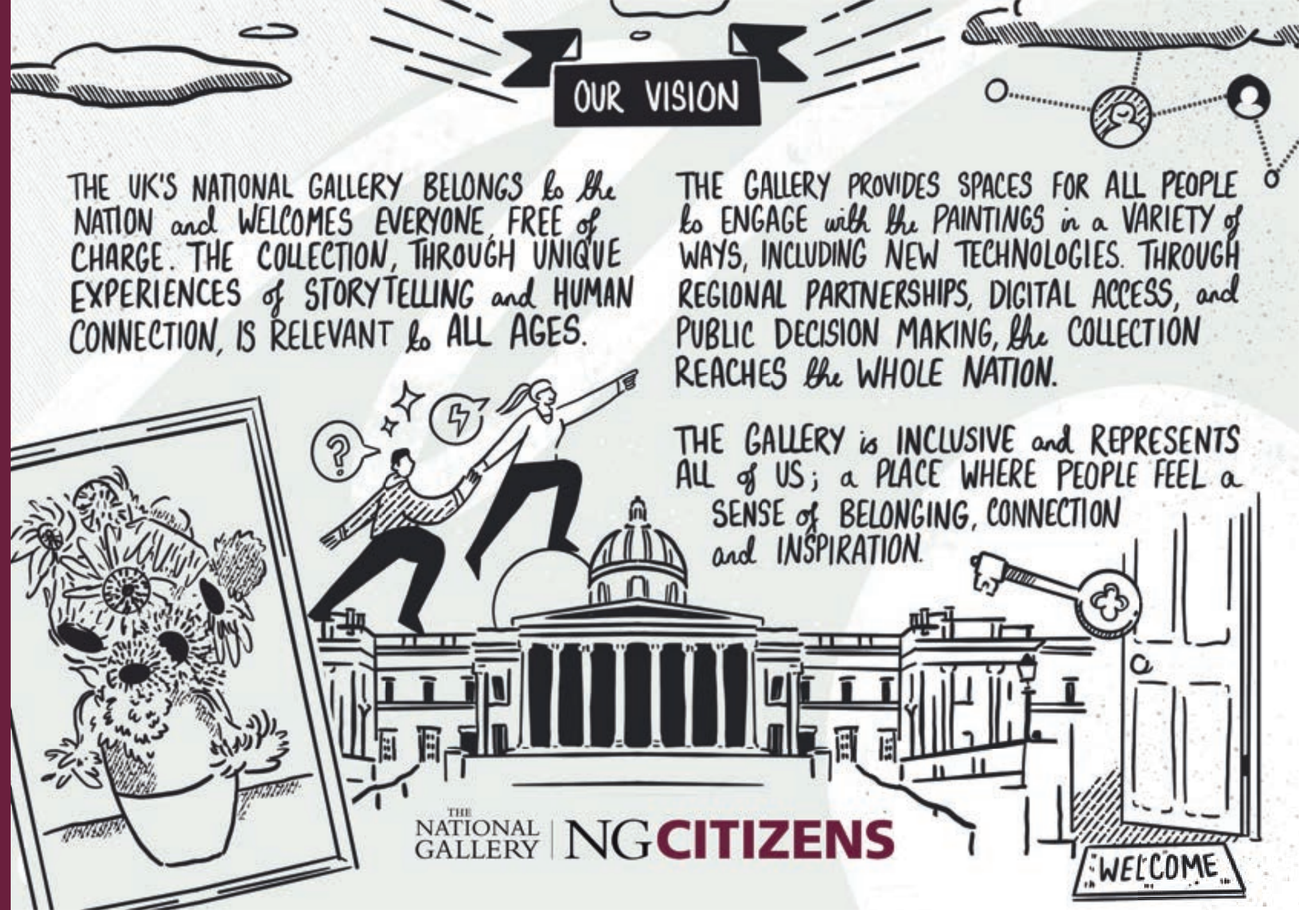
The session closed with Assembly Members presenting their final vision and principles to Sir Gabriele Finaldi, the Director of the National Gallery, other senior gallery staff and observers. This was a significant moment: a celebration of what 50 people had built together with the support of the National Gallery over five months, and a powerful, visible demonstration of what collaborative decision making can produce.

"The session was engaging, inclusive, and impactful. I valued the collaborative discussions, the opportunity to contribute to key recommendations, and the sense that every voice was heard. It was a rewarding experience, and I'm proud to have been part of it."
- Assembly Member

RIGHT
Snapshot of participants in Session Five.



THE VISION AND PRINCIPLES





PRINCIPLE 1

Headline Statement

The National Gallery should tell the human stories of the paintings, their creation and history, and their life since joining the collection to facilitate visitors making their own meaningful stories.

Why does this matter?
This is how people connect to one another and to paintings
Being exposed to other stories and perspectives is good for society as a whole
This principle is directly connected to all other principles
This will help educate and enthuse visitors
We want human stories that explore history, life and death, equality, and personal meaning

Which challenges does this principle address?
Visitors struggling to connect emotionally, and possibly not repeat visitors
Local community engagement
Geographic Inequality
Disability and the arts
Can art ever be open to everyone?
Young people
Should galleries get involved in broader social issues?
Anti Racism
What does ‘national’ mean?
Poverty and access to culture



PRINCIPLE 2

Headline Statement

The National Gallery has a social responsibility to provide help and encouragement where needed to invite a diverse audience representative of the UK to meaningfully engage with its paintings.

Why does this matter?
Current audience doesn't represent London or the UK as a whole
The Gallery could provide opportunities and outreach, improving people's lives through their connection to art and helping young people
The National Gallery is uniquely positioned to do art interventions in communities through creative partnerships
If the National Gallery doesn't do this work, potentially no one will and many people will never be able to access the benefits of connecting with art

Which challenges does this principle address?
Disability and the arts
Anti Racism
Young people
Geographic Inequality
Audience Segmentation: Barriers and Enablers
Poverty and access to culture
What does 'national' mean?
Can art ever be open to everyone?



PRINCIPLE 3

Headline Statement

The National Gallery should be bold, brave and future thinking in its changes regarding curatorial, programmes, decision making, and art selection to ensure it represents the width and diversity of the UK.

Why does this matter?
Decision makers need to make bold decisions or no change will happen
If you aren't brave, you are scared and you will never progress
Being brave and bold is about moving away from how things have always been done
It takes radical action to change the status quo

Which challenges does this principle address?
How can the Gallery balance its role as a free public gallery whilst being commercially minded?
Poverty and access to culture
What is the social value of art? How can art galleries explain and support this?
Local community engagement
Anti Racism
Can art ever be open to everyone?
Geographic Inequality
Do art galleries need to adapt to new and emerging technologies? If so, how?
Disability and the arts
What role should art galleries play as public buildings?
Young People
Should galleries get involved in broader social issues?
Audience Segmentation: Barriers and Enablers
What does 'national' mean?

LEFT
Early artist's impression of the new wing concept.
Credit: Kin Creatives. April 2026.



PRINCIPLE 4

Headline Statement

The National Gallery needs to embrace and grow commercial opportunities to be able to continue their existing, and invest in new, inclusive programmes to reach new and diverse audiences.

Why does this matter?
The National Gallery needs to demonstrate the value of its offering and embrace the audiences willing to pay for extra services so it can be an inclusive and accessible place
Financial sustainability is essential to be able to fund all other principles, projects and initiatives
To create and support commercial opportunities that enhance and embed fully funded access to all to sustain the future of the National Gallery
*It **must** be kept free admission to support accessibility and openness to all*

Which challenges does this principle address?
How can the Gallery balance its role as a free public gallery whilst being commercially minded?
Can art ever be open to everyone?



PRINCIPLE 5

Headline Statement

The National Gallery should embrace the pioneering history of being a public owned institution and surface the diverse history hidden in its vast collection

Why does this matter?
The National Gallery must always be changing and so should the Collection. That story should be told clearly.
Build trust with different audiences by providing the full context and history (the good and the bad) behind the paintings
If the public are reminded that the National Gallery belongs to all of us, then everyone will feel more engaged

Which challenges does this principle address?
Anti Racism
What is the social value of art? How can art galleries explain and support this?
Poverty and access to culture
Disability and the arts
Geographic Inequality
Should galleries get involved in broader social issues?



PRINCIPLE 6

Headline Statement

The National Gallery should use technology to support a personalised itinerary, especially targeted at under represented groups, both remotely before visiting and on arrival

Why does this matter?
Provides a warm welcome at a low cost
Makes the Gallery feel less academic / intimidating
Signposting for visitors without a specific purpose
Underrepresented groups include families, students, differently abled, as well as others from the Gallery audience data

Which challenges does this principle address?
Young people
Geographic Inequality
Disability and the arts
Audience Segmentation: Barriers and Enablers
Do art galleries need to adapt to new and emerging technologies? If so, how?
Can art ever be open to everyone?
Anti Racism
Financial sustainability



PRINCIPLE 7

Headline Statement

The National Gallery should work in collaboration with partners and communities across the four nations, through sharing paintings and resources to reflect public ownership.

Why does this matter?

The National Gallery is owned by the UK public; therefore it is essential to identify and address barriers to engagement

Collaboration should be intentional and representative to enable new diverse audiences to engage with the Gallery by bringing people and paintings together

Which challenges does this principle address?

Poverty and Access to Culture

Anti Racism

Geographic Inequality

What does 'national' mean?

What role should art galleries play as public buildings?

Audience Segmentation: Barriers and Enablers

Local community engagement

Young people

Can art ever be open to everyone?



PRINCIPLE 8

Headline Statement

The collection urgently needs to be a true reflection of the UK: its history, stories, artists and people, through new acquisitions and in updating how the current collection is presented to the public.

Why does this matter?
The current collection does not represent the UK people or its diversity - it is too limited in scope
*This needs to be **urgently** addressed*
Currently the collection has no emotional relevance to large portions of the UK population

Which challenges does this principle address?
Local community engagement
Poverty and access to culture
Young people
Can art ever be open to everyone?
Anti Racism
Should galleries get involved in broader social issues?
Audience Segmentation: Barriers and Enablers
What role should art galleries play as public buildings?



The Assembly Members worked through each Principle to imagine what a day in the life of a visitor might be and how the Principle addresses potential motivations and barriers for that visit.

These scenarios, combined with ideas for action, will be taken forward as part of the Panel work in phase two to give life to project development, generating new ideas and exploring new ways to engage the whole of the UK.

PHASE TWO
THE NG CITIZENS' PANEL



Following the presentation of the final Vision and Principles, the External Advisory Group and Internal Advisory Group met to agree the next steps, formulating recommendations on how we embed the Vision and Principles into the culture of the National Gallery. Consensus was reached on progressing with a serious and bold approach that maintains the energy and ambition of the project, keeping art at the centre and tracking progress.

NG Citizens will now continue into its second phase: the Citizens' Panel. The Panel will consist of three separate cohorts between 2026 and 2030. Each cohort will be made up of 15 former Assembly Members and will have three opportunities to meet. The purpose of the Citizens' Panel is to feed into new project development.

Over 80% of Assembly Members said they would be interested in staying part of the Panel and will be selected at random to take part. While not all Assembly Members can take part in the first Panel cohort, all Members who have expressed interest will have the opportunity to take part.

The National Gallery will anchor the work of the NG Citizens Panel (NGC Panel) with the overarching challenge:

How does the Gallery tell human stories alongside the story of painting, in all that it does?

We will take focused projects that will benefit from a UK public perspective to each NG Citizens Panel. In 2027, we will be working on the creation of a Guest Charter for the Gallery, and a deep dive into how we present future Room 1 exhibitions that bring both historical and contemporary paintings together.

The support and interest we have received from across the cultural sector and beyond, alongside the contributions of our guest speakers and the growing Citizen Assembly community, have been instrumental in the success of NG Citizens phase one.

The Gallery has already begun exploring ways to put some of the ideas emerging from phase one into practice. These include introducing later opening hours during the summer, giving visitors more opportunities to start their evening with art or drop in after work; enriching exhibition spaces through sensory experiences that include light and sound; and removing barriers to engaging with the collection by making the audio guide free for all visitors.

Phase two will begin shortly, with further ideas and principles being developed through the NGC Panel and translated into action, continuing to make the Gallery an ever-richer and more engaging experience for visitors.

LEFT
Photo from Session Five.

CONCLUSION

NG Citizens has been a steep learning curve for the National Gallery, breaking new ground for our continued commitment to co-designing the Gallery experience with the UK public.

The visions and principles are an asset to the Gallery. This democratically reached set of principles gives us a public mandate to be brave. By the end of the fifth session the NG Citizens had become incredibly well-informed visitors that had a far greater understanding of the mechanics of running a National Gallery. To have a group of people that we can work with over future years, who will maintain a critical and supportive perspective, presents opportunities far beyond the usual focus group approach.

The National Gallery was the first of its kind to do this on this scale, in the world. We can accept it was never going to be perfect; it would present challenges, but we hope observers can learn from our experience as we have from those who brought this methodology to us.

The support and interest we have received across the cultural sector and beyond, the guest speakers and the fast-growing Citizen Assembly community have been key to the successes in phase one of the project.

Phase two will begin shortly where discussion is turned into action.

RIGHT
Jan van Kessel the Elder, *Butterflies, Moths and Insects with Sprays of Creeping Thistle and Borage*, 1654, Gift from the collection of Willem Baron van Dedem, 2017 © The National Gallery, London.



APPENDIX



PROJECT PARTNERS

The National Gallery is home to over 2,600 works, including many famous paintings, such as van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait, Velázquez's Rokeby Venus, Turner's Fighting Temeraire and Van Gogh's Sunflowers.

All major traditions of Western European painting are presented, from the artists of the late medieval and Renaissance Italy to the French Impressionists. www.nationalgallery.org.uk

Involve is the UK's leading public participation charity. They are building a more vibrant democracy, where everyone can shape a society that works for all of us. www.involve.org.uk

The Sortition Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation. They specialise in recruiting for these kinds of events. They select people by lottery, in a way that is representative of the wider population. www.sortitionfoundation.org.uk

LEFT
Jansz. Treck, Vanitas Still Life, 1648, Presented by Anthony N. Sturt and his wife Marjorie, 1991
© The National Gallery, London.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to our External Advisory Group:

- Nusrat Ahmed, *curator of South Asia galleries at Manchester Museum*
- Lisa Anderson, *former Managing Director at the Black Cultural Archives*
- Gemma Blackshaw, *Professor, Royal College of Art, London*
- Sam Bompas, *Bompas and Parr Studio*
- Andrew Ellis, Deborah Loeb Brice Director and Chief Executive of Art UK
- David Jubb, *Co-Director, Citizens in Power Network*
- Rebecca Lyons, *Director Pitzhanger Art Gallery and former Director of Collections Royal Academy of Arts*
- Kim McAleese, *Director of Edinburgh Art Festival*
- LaToyah McAllister-Jones, *CEO of St Paul's Carnival in Bristol*
- Viktor Mikolajczyk, *Slade School of Fine Art and Alumni of the National Gallery's Articulation programme*
- Dr Mark O'Neill, *former director of Glasgow Museums and an adviser to Birmingham Museums Trust*
- Claire Saddleton, *CEO of VocalEyes*
- George Shaw, *Professor, Royal College of Art, London*
- Sophia Smith Galer, *Journalist, author and creator*
- Yomi Sode, *Award winning poet and writer; recipient of the 2019 Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship*
- Dr Ben Thomas, *Associate Prof. Trinity College Dublin*
- Errollyn Wallen, *Master of the Kings Music.*
- Mark Williams, *Deputy Chief Executive of Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA)*

WITH THANKS TO OUR SPEAKERS:

- Verity Babbs, *Art Historian, author and comedian*
- Professor Eleonora Belfiore, *Professor of Space, Place and Creative Economies at Coventry University*
- Sally Booth, *Artist and trainer at VocalEyes*
- Stephanie Draper, *Director of Innovation and Practice at Involve*
- Richie Gibson, *Director of Culture and Place Shaping at Westminster City Council*
- Tony Heaton OBE, *award winning sculptor and Chair of Shape Arts*
- Professor Suzanne Macleod, *Co-director of Research Centre for Museums and Galleries Leicester University*
- Viktor Mikolajczyk, *Slade School of Fine Art and Alumni of the National Gallery's Articulation programme*
- Leslie Palanker-Jermyn, *Assistant Learning Officer at South Shields Museum and Arbeia Roman Fort*
- Professor Ross Parry, *Director of the Institute for Digital Culture at Leicester University*
- Claire Saddleton, *CEO of VocalEyes*
- Dr Trish Scott, *Lecturer in Arts and Cultural Management at Kings College London*
- Jon Sleigh, *Arts Educator, Learning Officer and Curator*
- Marlene Wylie, *Creative Education Consultant*

FROM THE NATIONAL GALLERY

- Lawrence Chiles, *Head of Digital Services*
- Alan Crookham, *Chief Librarian and Archivist*
- Karen Eslea, *Head of Learning and National Programmes*
- Paul Gray, *Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer*
- Alex Kavanagh, *Head of Exhibitions*
- Larry Keith, *Head of Conservation and Keeper*
- Jane Knowles, *former Director of Public Engagement*
- Simon Magill, *Deputy Head of Communications*
- Christine Riding, *Director of Collections and Research*
- Dr Per Rumberg, *Jacob Rothschild Head of the Curatorial Department*
- Marika Spring, *Head of Scientific*
- Francesca Whitlum-Cooper, *Curator of Later Italian, Spanish and French Paintings*
- Josie Wood, *Evaluation Manager*

WITH THANKS TO OUR INTERNAL ADVISORY GROUP:

- Communications
- Digital
- Curatorial and Research
- Exhibitions
- Data & Insight
- Creative
- Learning and National Programmes
- Development
- Loyalty, Sales and Ticketed Experiences
- Brand Licensing and Picture Research
- Hosted Guest Experience
- Human Resources

Additional thanks to Graphic Facilitator, Abigail Baldwin from Buttercrumble, Filmmaker Daisy Ifama, and independent evaluator Isabella Roberts.

WITH THANKS TO OUR PROJECT TEAM:

- Simon Magill, *Deputy Head of Communications*
- Joshua Mort, *Senior Public Affairs Manager*
- Stefano Cattaneo, *Senior Data and Insight Manager*
- Saffron Bowdler, *Communications Manager (Audience & Brand)*
- Alistair Small, *Public Affairs Manager*
- Baylee McKeel, *Former Executive Assistant, Directors Office*
- Kritika Salhotra, *Communications Administrator*
- Rohini Sharma, *Audience Researcher*

- Madeline Gogh
- Daisy Thomson
- Linnea Erasmie-Jones
- Geraldine Addo-Adamu
- Stephanie Draper
- Marianna Mooney

GLOSSARY

Citizens' Assembly
A group of everyday people, chosen at random to reflect the make-up of the UK, who come together to learn about an issue, discuss it, and agree recommendations on what should happen next.

Civic Lottery
The random process used to invite people to take part in a citizens' assembly. Invitations are sent to households across the UK, and from those who respond, a small group are chosen to reflect the wider population in terms of attitudes and demographics. This means the final group isn't self-selecting but is a genuine cross-section of the public.

Deliberation
The process of carefully learning about an issue, thinking it through collectively, and discussing it together before reaching a decision or recommendation.

Marketplace
A session where different speakers each set up a 'stall' with information on a particular topic. Assembly Members move around, visiting stalls to learn and ask questions.

Silent Discussion
An activity where Assembly Members write and draw their ideas together on a large shared sheet, without talking, as a way of sharing thoughts and spotting common themes.

Feedback Carousel
An activity where Assembly Members move around the room looking at each other's work and leaving feedback to help improve and strengthen ideas.

FULL VOTE

The table here shows the full results of the vote held in Session 5. The statements listed are the original headlines, written by Assembly Members in their own words. The eight statements that received the most votes were later refined into the final wording of the principles, which appear in the main body of this report.

Original Headline Statements	# of Votes
The Gallery should tell human stories	33
The Gallery should encourage and invite under-represented, diverse audiences, with relevant and curated experiences	30
The Gallery should be brave, bold, future thinking and not confined by tradition, whilst retaining what's good about it	29
The Gallery needs to remain financially sustainable and embrace commercial opportunities both in-person and online	28
The Gallery should be more informative about its wider history, representation, and context behind the art	27
The Gallery should offer personalised experiences to create a more engaging experience both at the Gallery and remotely	25
The Gallery is owned by the UK public and so it should be truly national	24
The collection should have paintings that are representative of history in an inclusive way	23
The Gallery should work with teachers to deliver lessons about art and link it to the curriculum	21
The Gallery should empower people to have a lifelong relationship with the Gallery by offering tailored experiences for all ages	20
Inclusion begins before the door. The Gallery needs to be proactively reaching different people to welcome them to the Gallery	19
The staff at the Gallery should be representative, especially those with more decision making power	18
The Gallery should be clear and open about when and why it uses AI and emerging technology	18
A trip to the Gallery should leave people inspired to bring more creativity into their lives	18
The Gallery's personality should be broadly appealing to anyone and be less intimidating	15
Visitors should feel involved and engaged, not just looking at art but taking part in the experience	15
The Gallery space should be inviting, comfortable, and create space for reflection	14
The Gallery should prioritise accessibility in everything it does	9
The Gallery should play a role in promoting inclusivity in society	8
Decisions about programmes and collections should be made with the wider public	7
The Gallery should utilise all of its works, not keep lots in storage	1

FOR MORE

To stay updated on the NGC Panel visit The National Gallery website.



RIGHT
Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire*, 1839, Turner Bequest, 1856, © The National Gallery, London.