

**MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION**

WORKING WONDERS

**AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE
MUSEUM WORKFORCE**



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

**Executive
summary**

CONTEXT

Museums bring collections and the stories they hold to life, providing opportunities for enjoyment, learning and wellbeing. It is understood more than ever that their key role is to work alongside the communities they represent to collect, care for and share knowledge about material that reflects the rich history of the UK and the wider world.

The climate in which museums operate is changing on an unprecedented scale. The sector is experiencing long-term budget

cuts and a culture change to reduce reliance on public funding, combined with a growing need to value and demonstrate the public impact of museums. The pace and scale of this change must be appreciated by everyone working in the sector, so that museums can reassess their position, their role and their future. Armed with a fresh vision, museums need to invest in the people that make up their workforce so that they are flexible, adaptable and able to implement necessary change.

HISTORY OF THE ACTION PLAN

In 2008 the Museums Association (MA) worked in partnership with Creative & Cultural Skills to produce the Cultural Heritage Blueprint: a workforce development plan for the cultural heritage sector. In 2012, the MA updated the Blueprint to reflect current challenges and offer workforce development recommendations that sector bodies could use to inform their plans. The 2012 update focuses on museums as a part of cultural heritage and identifies five key recommendations for workforce development.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MUSEUM WORKFORCE

- 1.** Strengthen leadership and management.
- 2.** Develop business, enterprise and entrepreneurial skills.
- 3.** Open up entry to the sector and diversify the workforce.
- 4.** Commit to CPD for staff.
- 5.** Develop sector-specific skills.

Following the publication of the 2012 Blueprint, the MA received a grant through Arts Council England's Strategic Support Fund to create an action plan based on its recommendations. This action plan brings the report's findings together with opinions from consultation respondents and emerging thinking from initiatives such as the MA's Museums 2020 campaign. In doing so, the plan sets workforce development in a strategic context for funders and

organisations that are negotiating the scale of change currently facing the sector. It sets out activities that different sector bodies and groups have committed to on behalf of the sector, some of which draw out common issues and potential for future working alongside other areas of arts and heritage. Finally, it highlights emerging good practice from different organisations and groups, especially where the sector can learn from examples in other parts of the UK.

The action plan was put together by a steering group drawn from the UK museum sector and chaired by Iain Watson, director of Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums. For full details of the steering group see p11. The next section summarises actions for sector bodies, for museums and for individuals.

ACTIONS AND COMMITMENTS

ACTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES AND PUBLIC FUNDERS:

- Arts Council England, CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) and Northern Ireland Museums Council will support leadership and management programmes as part of delivering their national strategies and policies.
- Funders should continue to support emerging models for a) Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through reflexive practice; and b) regional or local knowledge sharing networks that stimulate participation and respond to demand, such as SHARE Museums East, Oxford ASPIRE and the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales.
- Funders should bring past publications and resources on specialist skills together online where they are not already available.
- Creative & Cultural Skills will conduct cultural heritage research in 2013 to audit training provided in the cultural heritage sector and compare it with the skills needed by employers, particularly those they find difficult to recruit or access. This should inform future investment in sector specific skills, including both traditional skills and those that an increasingly interdisciplinary workforce needs to develop. This could be aligned with research into effective entry routes to the sector and the skills that entrants need.
- Creative & Cultural Skills, through the National Skills Academy, will offer £15m to support apprenticeships and internships across the creative and cultural industries, and will create the Get Into Heritage website to offer careers advice to young people.
- The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) will support better management of heritage and organisations through the open programmes Our Heritage and Heritage Grants, as well as Catalyst, start-up grants and transition funding.
- HLF will offer further rounds of Skills for the Future, with £15m to be awarded in 2013.
- Through Catalyst, HLF will provide support to the heritage sector to increase endowments and build fundraising capacity (with partner funding from Arts Council England and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for arts). HLF will also offer transition grants to previous grant-holders who are reassessing their governance and business models. HLF will embed learning from organisations who receive grants through its online communities.

ACTIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP BODIES AND NETWORKS:

- In late 2013, the MA will relaunch the Fellowship of the Museums Association (FMA), which recognises individuals who go above and beyond their job role to lead change in the museum sector. The MA will also develop its online Find an Event facility to help the sector better signpost available training and development opportunities.
- People in some of the more hard-to-reach parts of the workforce would benefit from support to tackle key decision-making points in their careers and build skills and behaviours in management; this includes, for example, mid-level managers, project officers and freelance contractors. In 2013, the MA will investigate how it can provide support to mid-career individuals and those who work freelance at some point in their career.
- The MA is seeking funding to continue running the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund from 2014.
- A number of networks will offer training in aspects of business skills over 2013-14, as requested by their members. For example SHARE Museums East will focus on commerciality and the National Skills Development programme in Scotland will feature a number of formal training courses addressing business skills.
- The Association of Independent Museums (AIM) should, with funding support, build on its 2012-13 work supporting organisational resilience by disseminating good practice and mentoring to develop skills in better governance, leadership and commercially-oriented practice.
- The teaching museum initiative will pilot a holistic approach to training new entrants, using open recruitment to invigorate its workforce. Learning from this model should be shared across the sector, particularly among recipients of Skills for the Future grants.

ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND MUSEUMS:

- Aspiring leaders and managers should use current development opportunities to create a vision for the future of their organisations. They need to develop the skills and behaviours to implement change.
- Leaders and managers of museums should embrace an enterprising attitude in order to source or foster the skills needed to make their organisations more entrepreneurial. Participation in self-driven networks like Re.volution or Directing Change can be a great facilitator for this.
- Museums should adopt practices that support diversity and allow the workforce to accurately reflect communities, out of both moral duty and business sense. This includes working with young people considering their future career and fostering inclusive, competency-based recruitment practices.
- Employers should support their staff to undertake CPD linked to their role and overall strategic priorities. They should encourage participation in regional and specialist networks, peer learning networks and formal professional development programmes. This is particularly important as staff roles are changing and responsibilities expanding.
- Museums and training providers should share materials online to support CPD beyond their networks and avoid duplication of effort.
- Organisations should put together knowledge management plans that enable them to understand the skills and knowledge they need and link this to the CPD they support their staff to undertake. Organisations should use methodologies like the Monument Fellowships to maintain and refresh knowledge.

OUTSTANDING AREAS FOR CONCERN:

- For museums to implement change in terms of diversifying income and becoming more enterprising, they need to radically reassess their role and purpose and develop an approach that allows greater risk taking. This level of transformation requires understanding and support from leaders and governing bodies of museums, as well as funders and sector bodies.
- There is an oversupply of people who want to begin a career in museums and efforts to broaden entry routes to the sector have been in place for several years. Funders should consider undertaking independent research into the most effective entry routes to better guide individuals. The National Skills Academy also offers an opportunity to forge more constructive relationships between training providers and employers to support entry to the workforce.
- People in museums have demonstrated their willingness to participate in informal networks and share learning through reflexive practice, but it is clear that such networks should be outward-looking in supporting colleagues and linking to public outputs. Funders and organisations should enable this by supporting (or continuing to support) knowledge sharing networks that contribute to the museum sector and have strong links to public impact, informed by the findings of Creative & Cultural Skills' cultural heritage research.

KEY THEMES

Among these actions and throughout the longer action plan document, where they are discussed in greater detail, a number of key themes emerge.

In spite of reduced central support in England and a period of flux in Scotland and Northern Ireland (including the transformation of MGS and local government reform in Northern Ireland), funders and strategic bodies are still offering significant support for workforce development. Competition for funds may be strong and gaps certainly remain, but in each of the five categories of the action plan there are positive actions and opportunities that museums can pursue.

One area in which funders and larger institutions (i.e. national museums and, as they establish their programmes, Major Partner Museums) could improve is in coordinating their support for workforce development to ensure that

funding programmes complement each other and are easier for museums to navigate. For example, Arts Council England and HLF are both investing in widening entry to the workforce and building business and enterprise skills (see table), but it is not clear how their programmes influence one another or share learning. Similarly, some national museums incorporate much more workforce development support into their partnership work than others; for example, the British Museum's Fresh Leads scheme or the participation of some nationals in the Sharing Expertise Group. Better coordination and sharing of lessons learned would make things clearer for participants and create greater long-term impact. It is difficult to bring networks that develop from grassroots need, like Subject Specialist Networks (SSNs) and local groups, together into a picture of overall provision for the sector. However,

strategic and centrally-funded bodies should share their strategies better to achieve more coordinated support.

With an unprecedented level of change facing the sector, the only real option for individuals and museums is to step up and lead the charge. For museums to survive and thrive, individuals at all levels need to reassess their role and think about how they can build the skills and confidence required to implement change. Programmes offered by funders and strategic bodies are one way forward, but so are the informal, reflexive approaches to CPD outlined in the later sections of the action plan; for example, local networks, buddying and mentoring. Organisations need to value and prioritise workforce development to support change in the sector, but equally, CPD is self-directed and individuals must embrace the opportunities open to them.

While progress is being made on all five of the Blueprint's recommendations, the consultation highlighted more divergent views in two of the categories in particular. In the section on workforce diversity, broadening of entry routes is discussed in tandem with the at times seemingly intractable issue of the oversupply of people trying to enter the sector at a time when the job market is shrinking. Also in this section, the action plan highlights opposing views on the role of employers and higher education providers in achieving diversity and fairness. The new National Skills Academy offers a way forward to forging better relationships, while the action recommended by this plan to conduct independent research into the most effective entry routes to museums could provide an understanding of the impact of efforts to support broader entry and diversity. These points in particular will need review over the coming two years.

The other problematic area of the action plan is that of sector specific skills, where the nature of skills and knowledge that museums need to access are varied and difficult to pin down. It is clear that these range from highly specialised knowledge (e.g. of a particular collection type) to skills that need to be embedded across museums (e.g. use of digital technologies), as well as skills and trades that are in decline outside museums (e.g. traditional crafts and conservation). However, at a further level of detail, opinions differ about the relative importance of different skills and knowledge, and many people tend to feel that their particular specialism is undervalued. The cultural heritage research being undertaken by Creative & Cultural Skills and English Heritage, which is due for publication in autumn 2013, should offer new insight into the issue and this section of the action plan will be reviewed in light of its findings.

As the consultation and research has shown, people in museums are prepared to work together to share knowledge and skills through, for example, SSNs and partnerships with academia and/or lay communities, so investment in building and refreshing skills and knowledge should be directed by the results of the cultural heritage research.

FUTURE ACTIONS

The steering group for the Workforce Action Plan will be convened again in late 2013 to review the document in light of research and progress. The MA, in partnership with Creative & Cultural Skills, will also remain active in promoting and monitoring the plan over the next two years at least. This will include investigating how the MA can provide support for mid-career individuals and for people who work independently or freelance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The MA would like to thank the steering group, whose members have generously given their time and wisdom to the action plan and who have committed to many of the actions listed here. Thanks must also go to the individuals who contributed their opinions, examples and case studies during the consultation in order to help develop this action plan.

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