

# The Tomorrow People:

## Entry to the museum workforce

### Introduction, summary and possible actions

This is an extract from a report to the Museums Association and the University of East Anglia, by Maurice Davies, April 2007.

The full report is available at [www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org)

1.1 Entry to the museum workforce is becoming a topic of increasing discussion. There are claims that there are too many museum-studies students, concerns about low pay, worries about workforce diversity and fears that staff are not progressing. There are too many applicants for some jobs and barely any for others.

1.2 Drawing on the views and experiences of museum managers, job hunters, young professionals, policy makers and university lecturers, this report explores all of these issues. It has a particular focus on the role of museum-studies courses, but in the context that museums are neglecting their responsibility to train and develop the workforce at entry-level.

1.3 This report has been undertaken with the help of the Museums Association (my employer) and a visiting fellowship from the University of East Anglia. Without their intellectual and financial support it would not have been possible. Many people have contributed, notably at a symposium for employers, hosted by UEA and funded by Creative and Cultural Skills, and in response to calls for information and a limited consultation. The 100+ people who have contributed are listed on pp58-61. I am grateful to them all; their comments and responses have developed my thinking, enriched my analysis and challenged my assumptions. I hope that I have done justice to people's views in this report. Some are quoted verbatim in appendix 2.

1.4 The conclusions here are my own. Taking account of other people's views has not been too hard as, with few exceptions, there has been a strong consensus that aspects of entry-level training and recruitment could be improved and that change is desirable. The great majority of participants in the employers' seminar and respondents to the limited consultation agreed with all the following key findings and recommendations.

1.5 My key finding is that **employers are usually delighted with the quality of people they are able to appoint to entry-level posts**, especially as salaries are so low. However, I have identified five problems.

## Five problems

- **Problem 1** There is little diversity among entrants to the museum workforce. Museums want more people from minority-ethnic backgrounds, more people from poorer backgrounds, more disabled people – and more men. However, **too few attempts are being made to increase diversity. Many potential applicants are deterred** by the current approach to entry which favours people with voluntary experience who are often over qualified.
- **Problem 2** There are also some areas of shortage at entry-level – for example, people with expertise in natural science and technology and, in some areas, education and learning staff. **The museum sector has no effective mechanisms to tackle skills shortages.**
- **Problem 3** Many individuals have an extremely difficult time securing their first reasonable museum job. **Much time, energy and talent is wasted.**
- **Problem 4** University-based museum-studies courses play a large role in pre-entry and entry-level training but **museums are unsure of the value of museum-studies courses and do not give them much support.**
- **Problem 5** Although there are many applicants for entry-level jobs, museums often find it hard to recruit for junior and middle-management posts. **Museums do not do enough to nurture and develop new recruits to prepare them to take on more responsibility.**

1.6 Addressing these five problems will require a fundamental change in approach. The overall, and perhaps rather obvious, conclusion is that all organisations involved need to take more responsibility. **Individual museums, and sector bodies, need to take far more responsibility for training and development** of staff at entry-level and in their first few years in post. In addition, **university museum-studies courses need to take more responsibility** for their overall impact on the museum workforce. This conclusion leads to six recommendations.

## Six recommendations

- **Recommendation 1** Museums should provide high-quality volunteering, work-experience and internships for a wide range of people interested in a museum career.
- **Recommendation 2** There should be a widening of entry routes with employers supporting more traineeships, apprenticeships and internal progression of staff.
- **Recommendation 3** Far greater efforts need to be made to diversify the museum workforce.

- **Recommendation 4** As well as considering the needs of individual students, museum-studies courses need to take greater, more strategic responsibility for their impact on the museum workforce as a whole. Increased cooperation between museums and courses would bring benefits for students, museums and universities.
- **Recommendation 5** There needs to be better training and development for new entrants, including those on short-term contracts.
- **Recommendation 6** The AMA could play a bigger role.

1.7 The report sets out many actions, summarised below, that could be taken to implement these recommendations, but does not prioritise them. During 2007/8 the Museums Association (MA) will refine the recommendations and determine which actions are likely to have the greatest chance of success. The results will be published in a report and prioritised action plan in 2008. The MA will then work with other organisations to encourage improvements to entry-level recruitment and training.

1.8 In the meantime, the report sets out many things that museums, museum-studies courses and sector organisations could get on with (and that some are doing already).

1.9 The report also includes advice for individuals who are considering a career in museums, are considering a museum-studies course or are already in an entry-level job and wanting to progress. I hope this advice is useful and helps to bring some sense to a confusing, even chaotic, situation. See in particular appendix 3, which includes guidance on:

- Getting a first job
- Should I take a museum-studies course?
- How to thrive in the first few years of a museum career

1.10 Most of the problems identified here would not exist if more museums were proper learning organisations, committed to recruiting and developing their staff properly. The underlying message of the report is that museums would be better if they took staff recruitment and development more seriously. Too often museums rely on their staff to organise their own training and development. Continuing Professional Development and self-directed learning are good things, but employers have an overriding responsibility to develop their staff.

1.11 Improvements to the current unplanned approach to entry will make things better for job-seekers, of course, and also for museums - and the museum-studies courses that play such a big part in entry-level training. Most importantly they would help make museums more effective at using their collections and relating to audiences.

1.12 Many of the improvements suggested would have no, or relatively low, extra cost (although a few would need significant funding). To improve things,

something of a change in attitudes will be needed. Sector organisations, including the Museums Association and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, play only a very small role in entry to the workforce. They will have to play a part if things are to improve, as will Creative and Cultural Skills and university museum-studies courses. Most importantly each museum will need to recognise the enhanced role it could play in entry-level training and development and think more about the needs of the museum-sector workforce as a whole, in addition to its own immediate needs.

### **Defining 'entry-level' jobs**

1.10 Defining entry-level jobs has been difficult. In many museums, junior learning or curatorial posts are held by people doing their first paid work in a museum. This is particularly true of short-term contract posts. In others the most junior curatorial posts require several years' prior experience. Often, posts that are on paper suitable as a first museum job are in fact taken up by people with considerable experience and qualifications. (In a very few museums, employees can begin as museum assistants, in a primarily front-of-house role, and progress internally in a structured way to curatorial, learning or management roles.) I have therefore not adopted a strict definition of an entry-level post and have looked broadly at the types of job from which people tend to build careers in museums, such as museum education, curation, collections management, marketing, community/outreach work and museum management, rather than more generic areas such as IT, security, customer service, accountancy and retail. (A lack of expertise and time has made it impossible for me to investigate entry to conservation jobs.)

1.11 In general I have focused on jobs for which a degree (or postgraduate qualification) or equivalent is normally expected by employers, as recruitment to other posts tends to be more straightforward. I realise that this begs many questions, but hope my findings are useful nonetheless. I know that there are differences between different types of job (and different types of museum). In some areas, such as marketing, people are more likely to move in and out of museums than in others, such as collections management. I hope my tendency to generalise is as useful in suggesting a way forward as it is crude.

## Full list of possible actions

The Museums Association will consider these possible actions in more detail to determine which have the greatest chance of improving entry to the museum workforce.

**Recommendation 1** Museums should provide high-quality volunteering, work-experience and internships for a wide range of people interested in a museum career

### Possible actions that could improve volunteering and pre-entry work-experience (see Section 5)

1. To properly serve the needs of different kinds of volunteers it is essential that museums recognise the fundamental difference between people who are volunteering in order to gain work-experience and those who are doing so for leisure.
2. Museums could openly advertise and recruit for all their work-experience volunteering and internship opportunities
3. Sector organisations (MA, MLA, SMC, CyMAL, NIMC, CCS, especially its forthcoming creative knowledge lab) could consider the possibility of establishing a central web-based information point to advertise volunteering, internship and other work-experience opportunities
4. Expand work-experience internships for people at different stages in education. The MLA work is aimed at schoolchildren, and Young Graduates into Museums and Galleries is aimed at 16-19 year olds, but these schemes are both very small and need expanding rapidly if they are to have a significant impact. There is also no scheme for undergraduates or for people considering a change in career.
5. Sector organisations (some sector skills councils are doing this already) could consider drawing up 'light touch' good-practice guidance and standardised models for work-experience volunteering, internships and work-experience
6. There is probably much to learn from the USA where museum work-experience seems to be well organised
7. Hubs and regional agencies could consider employing work-experience/internship coordinators to advise and support several museums. It seems feasible to aim initially at one post per region or nation
8. National museums could consider playing a role in co-ordinating opportunities in museums nationwide with the same subject specialism
9. University museums could link undergraduates seeking work-experience with the wider museum community
10. Museums could consider the potential for including work-experience opportunities in specific projects. HLF could encourage this as a way of increasing community participation in museum projects. There may be potential for the work-experience to count as in-kind match funding

**Recommendation 2** There should be a widening of entry routes with employers supporting more traineeships, apprenticeships and internal progression of staff

**Possible actions that could improve entry-level training and development (see Section 9)**

11. All museums should have genuine entry-level positions that do not expect applicants to have previous museum experience or museum-specific qualifications and offer the opportunity to gain experience and qualifications and to progress
12. Larger museums could all be expected to have formal training programmes
13. Medium sized museums could all designate one post as a training position, possibly shared between two or three museums
14. Museums could work regionally (or nationally) to introduce training programmes. These could be employer-led partnerships that involve universities and other training providers
15. Hubs could lead generalist training programmes; nationals could lead more specialist programmes in their area
16. There may be particular benefits in regionally or nationally organised traineeships in areas of recruitment difficulty such as natural history curatorship. There may also be benefit in specific entry initiatives for education and learning and community staff, as these are areas where there is a growing demand
17. Museums should not unnecessarily inflate requirements for entry-level posts, even as a way of reducing the number of applications
18. Museums should select new entrants on the basis of their competence and potential, rather than requiring particular qualifications
19. Museums should not specify a museum-studies qualification as essential (or even desirable) unless it genuinely is
20. Museums that want entry-level staff with museum-studies qualifications should consider how they can support people to get those qualifications and also engage with appropriate museum-studies courses to influence their content and if possible assist with course development and work-experience
21. Sector bodies (MA, MLA, SMC, CyMAL, NIMC or SSC) could consider providing best-practice guidance on entry-level job descriptions, person specifications, recruitment processes and development opportunities
22. Good induction schemes would make it easier for museums to recruit people without museum-specific experience or qualifications
23. MLA and the hubs need to give careful thought to how Renaissance could in future do more to reshape entry to the workforce

**Recommendation 3** Far greater efforts need to be made to diversify the museum workforce

**Possible actions that could improve workforce diversity (see Section 7)**

24. Museums need to have a range of entry routes, accessible to a range of people with the potential to have a successful museum career. These are likely to include apprenticeships, traineeships and foundation degrees
25. Internal progression schemes have great potential for diversifying many parts of the workforce
26. Positive-action schemes targeting particular under-represented groups will have a significant role for some time to come
27. There is work to do to promote museum careers to a wider range of potential entrants, but this needs to be supported by accessible entry routes
28. There should be open recruitment to all entry-level posts. Short-term, junior posts often lead to more reasonable work so all positions, permanent and temporary, should be advertised, Everyone should have an equal chance to access 'foot-in-the-door' opportunities and they should not be automatically or informally offered to people already known to the museum
29. There may be benefits in marketing entry-level jobs (and places on museum-studies courses) to students at more diverse newer universities
30. The Museums Association could consider establishing a service to help employers target minority-ethnic applicants
31. More work needs to be done to diversify the intake of students onto university courses that supply museums. In addition to museum studies this includes history, art history, and archaeology. AHRC should take the need for positive-action into account in its funding for post-graduate students. Museum-studies courses should have their own positive-action initiatives
32. A substantial positive-action initiative, led by DCMS, could make a considerable difference. There may be benefit in an approach that covers several parts of the cultural sector
33. There is scope for more positive-action activity in Scotland and a need for action in Wales and Northern Ireland
34. National and regional targets for workforce diversification will be useful to encourage and assess progress

**Recommendation 4** As well as considering the needs of individual students, museum-studies courses need to take greater, more strategic responsibility for their impact on the museum workforce as a whole. Increased cooperation between museums and courses would bring benefits for students, museums and universities

## **Possible actions that could improve museum-studies courses (see Section 6)**

### **A Collaboration and partnership**

35. Closer working between museum-studies courses and museums could:
  - better match course content to employer needs and tackle areas of skill shortage
  - deliver better training (including more work-based learning)
  - ensure a good balance of teaching that includes current museum staff teaching to complement university staff who bring wider perspectives
  - ensure a wide range of people with career potential are selected for courses
  - increase the impact and influence of museum-studies departments on museums
36. As a starting point each course could hold regular (perhaps twice yearly) meetings with museums, especially those it hopes will employ its students
37. Courses could consider the benefits of working together to:
  - engage with museums
  - develop course content
  - share best practice in teaching and work-experience
38. The sector would benefit if, at the least, the courses formed a museum trainers forum. Funding may be available to develop more extensive ways of collaborating

### **B Course structures**

39. Courses could consider the benefits of gradually moving away from full-time tuition in favour of part-time/modular/distance-learning for people in museum work. Ideally some of these places would be available as part of formal partnerships with museums and include extensive work-experience. Courses could take the lead in trying to establish such partnerships (some of which could have a positive-action element to them)
40. Courses could explore other models of training, for example the system in archives and specialist libraries in which full-time students gain substantial structured paid work-experience before they start the course. Courses could take the lead in encouraging museums to establish paid pre-course training places
41. There seems to be fairly general agreement that the amount of structured work-experience organised as part of courses should be increased
42. Courses could work together and with museums to share best practice in work placements



### **C Data and selection of students**

43. It would help applicants if courses worked together to devise a consistent method of collecting and presenting data on student employment
44. In the meantime courses should make the difficulties of gaining employment clear to applicants before they accept an offer of a place on the course. The Museums Association could consider devising a standard form of words that could be used by all recognised courses
45. When selecting students who seek a career in museums, courses need to try to be sure that they really are likely to succeed
46. Individual courses should be clear about the specific types of job they are preparing students for

### **D Validation/recognition**

47. Following the demise of CHNTO validation, courses might take the lead on proposing a replacement scheme. The single most important criterion for a new validation/recognition scheme would be the relevance of the course to student and employer needs
48. Any replacement scheme for Museums Association recognition would probably want to address the entry-level issues as well as (or instead of) the issues of relevance to the AMA. It could assess some or all of:
  - a. Breadth of overall introduction to museums and their context
  - b. Quality of work-based learning
  - c. Success in preparing students for work
  - d. Relationships with museums
  - e. Widening participation/diversity
  - f. Clarity about the specific types of jobs the course is aimed at
  - g. Selection procedures
  - h. Information for applicants about employment difficulties
49. A replacement scheme might set out to identify a smaller number of centres of excellence, or have some kind of limit on the number of places it recognises each year

**Recommendation 5** There needs to be better training and development for new entrants, including those on short-term contracts

**Possible actions that could improve development in the first five years (see Section 10)**

50. Museums need to actively encourage new entrants to develop. They need to help staff consider their future career and develop the skills and knowledge they need to progress. Better employers push their staff and encourage them to move on and develop their management and leadership skills
51. Museums should devise approaches to staffing that give new entrants the opportunity to experience a range of different types of museum work. In all but the smallest museums, new staff can quickly become very narrow in their experience and outlook. One approach could be for new entrants to spend one day a week in different departments, or working with a member of staff in a different area, for their first one or two years. Alternatively people could be seconded into different areas for short periods
52. Line managers need to be skilled in developing the staff that report to them. A programme of training for line managers, perhaps organised regionally or nationally, could have a significant impact
53. Medium and larger museums could introduce their own internal progression schemes to encourage and support staff progression
54. All short-term contract staff should have development opportunities to improve their career prospects. The cost of this should be built in to funding applications. Wherever possible, consideration should be given to redesignating short-term contract posts as traineeships
55. Development means much more than going on courses and there could be more secondment and mentoring opportunities
56. Some support could be provided on a regional basis; for example new entrants from several museums could meet together regularly to experience other museums, hear about museum issues and develop their skills. This could be organised by consortia of museums, hubs or regional MLAs. It might link to the AMA
57. The Museums Association could consider a scheme specifically for new entrants to provide some of the things outlined above. It might link to the AMA, perhaps a first step towards the AMA. The MA could pilot it with Diversify alumni
58. Sector bodies (MA, MLA, SMC, CyMAL, NIMC, CCS, MPG) could consider ways of advising new entrants in developing their careers, such as career development days, career management advice, etc
59. Individuals entering museum work should demand development opportunities

**Recommendation 6** The AMA could play a bigger role

**Possible actions that could improve the impact of the AMA (see Section 10)**

60. There is not a case for a complete reinvention of the AMA. The basic framework is sound, although it could include additional criteria and might benefit from a slightly modular or two-stage approach to make it more accessible
61. Currently, everyone taking the AMA needs a qualification – either university- or NVQ-based. There might be merit in replacing this with a system in which the AMA itself assesses an applicant's knowledge and competence. There may be lessons from ICON's accreditation system. An alternative suggestion is that all AMA applicants should take an NVQ
62. Even though many people taking the AMA will not progress to leadership positions, all staff benefit from leadership (and management) skills. There should probably be an additional criterion to encourage this
63. For some potential applicants the 'starting point' for the AMA appears to be too high. To increase accessibility it would be useful to consider ways of extending the relevance of the AMA so that it can support and recognise the development of museum staff who are not (yet) working at the equivalent of NVQ level 4
64. This might also help make the AMA work better for people who enter the workforce through apprenticeship schemes and for recent entrants who are in temporary jobs
65. The main focus of the AMA should remain broadly based, although there could be an additional criterion to encourage applicants to develop in a specific area of museum work
66. There might be a role for specialist groups or SSNs in developing specific training and development in their specific area
67. Changes to the rules of the AMA could encourage more secondments so that people experience a wider range of museums and types of work
68. The Museums Association needs to be clearer about the overall purpose of the AMA, both strategically in terms of sector workforce development and in terms of the specific benefits it is intended to have for individuals and their employers
69. The AMA needs to meet employer needs (not least so that employers will support their staff in taking it)

Note: This summary is taken from a report that represents the results of an investigation undertaken by Maurice Davies. It is a piece of personal work and should not be taken to be the view of the Museums Association.

The full report is available at [www.museumsassociation.org](http://www.museumsassociation.org)