

The Tomorrow People:

Entry to the museum workforce

Research report to the Museums Association and the University of East Anglia by Maurice Davies, April 2007

Appendix 2

A selection of comments

This appendix includes a selection of comments that are otherwise mainly unpublished. It consists of written comments I received in the course of my investigation and a few other things, such as responses made to the DCMS consultation on their first *Understanding the Future* paper in 2005.

1 Comments from employers

In *Understanding the Future*, its consultation about museums, DCMS asked about entry-level training. Several respondents commented and certain key themes emerged.

DCMS itself summarised the responses as follows:

‘Respondents encouraged the sector skills council to engage with higher education to foster training that was more practical and ‘on the job’, with greater work experience opportunities and internships for undergraduates.

‘There was a perception that the sector is underinvesting in new recruits.

‘Entry requirements for posts should also be examined as they tend to reinforce white middle class recruitment patterns, rather than widen the employee pool and encourage young talent to enter the museums profession.

‘There was also general appreciation that museums should be more proactive in calling for a wider choice of training entry routes to include apprenticeships, NVQs, and Foundation Degrees to enhance prospects for creating a more diverse workforce.’

Museums should take more responsibility for entry-level training

‘There is a general need for structured traineeships, along [the] model of the Diversify ones, to give new entrants a wide range of experience rather than being channelled immediately into one role. I am aware that our Diversify

trainees have been given a better induction into the profession than other members of staff who have entered the profession by taking up an entry-level job which is narrow in focus. There is potentially a role for the hubs here and one which would benefit the whole sector over time.’ (Harris Museum and Art Gallery, UtF response)

‘It is important to maximise practitioner input into museum-studies courses... The MPrac qualifications under development [at Newcastle University] may provide a useful model.’ (Tyne and Wear Museums, UtF response)

‘Large museums... should be encouraged by additional funding to provide internships for both pre- and post-entry trainees to provide both skills and experience. The regional hubs ought to accept this as a responsibility.’ (Fitzwilliam Museum, UtF response)

‘The abundance of candidates for museum jobs has led to complacency within the sector about recruitment, professional development, pay and retention. While there may be plenty of candidates for museum jobs, there is growing evidence of a crisis in recruitment and leadership... and many institutions having to advertise several times over for senior jobs... The most valuable way of enhancing career development [in contemporary art in particular] would be for the sector’s lead bodies to invest in research, travel and opportunities for intellectual debate from the earliest possible stage in curator’s careers. Contacts, knowledge and experience accrue slowly over time. These things need to be nurtured by the employer. But the generally introspective and parochial culture of local government does not allow this to happen. [So sector bodies need to take a lead.]’ (West Midlands Hub, UtF response)

‘We see real benefit in the sector providing more work experience opportunities across all levels of the workforce, from school age to graduate, early career, mid career and career changers, and in developing accredited schemes for such placements.’ (National Trust, UtF response)

‘The assistant curator development programme ... ensures a succession of trainee curators is always in place.’ (V&A, UtF response)

‘We need to build relationships with trainers, including universities, to tailor entry-level training to meet local circumstances where possible... [Recruitment could be difficult in areas such as natural sciences and technology curation so] we need to be assessing our links with regional universities – perhaps a partnership approach to curatorial apprenticeships/internships is worth exploring.’ We have already sought generalist documentation staff and from them ‘grown our own specialists to cover the specific documentation fields (aviation, coalmining and costume among others) working alongside specialist curators as mentors. This approach has worked very well so far.’ (Heather Broughton’ Leicestershire Museums, symposium written comments)

‘The sector needs to monitor its workforce and recruitment and to respond to changes fast. For example, at present there are huge problems recruiting natural sciences curators... We are considering the establishment of an entry-level post to recruit a natural scientist to train as a museum professional. This type of training post could address a number of gaps in our workforce... [They] should be for time limited periods – maybe in partnership with FE/HE institutions. Even modest financial incentives would help this develop, but it needs to be co-ordinated nationally.’ (Bolton Museums, UtF response)

‘I entered the museum sector at the age of 30 (having retrained after a career in marketing) and had been lucky to get a job straight out of university that year (more due to who I knew than anything else), as a result I have strong views on the difficulties for new graduates in finding that first museum job and have little time for the attitude of some museum professionals who seem to feel new graduates need to ‘prove’ themselves by working as a museum volunteer ... even for the most junior museum posts. After three or four years of study... for an industry where pay is low, I find it totally unacceptable that we should expect newcomers to work for free. Therefore when I came to putting together the job description and person specification [for a new temporary post] I felt that this was an opportunity to give someone a leg up and be paid at the same time.’ In spite of limited advertising over Christmas there were 68 applications ‘I could easily have interviewed 40 candidates... I would rather have recruited a dozen of them than a dozen with greater experience but lacking in enthusiasm, who are bitter and cynical, often the end result of the first few years in the sector. The answer could be to establish some form of programme that encourages museums to take on ‘museum juniors’, pay them and allow them to gain experience so they can progress up the career ladder... in the smaller local museums... these ‘juniors’ [could] learn a bit of everything... There are too many graduates who have so much to offer us who end up giving up and working in other fields. And there are too many museum professionals who seem to think just because it was hard in their day to get the first job, that means we shouldn’t change anything today.’ (KG)

Limitations of university museum-studies courses

‘Museum-studies courses only contribute to one or two areas of our workforce [eg curatorial] and exclude others. For many there is no museum-related pre-entry training – customer services, for example.’ (Bolton Museums, UtF response)

‘More work is required on matching post-graduate training to the roles and work required. This could be a useful research project with hubs, who have recruited significant numbers of postgraduates.’ (Tyne and Wear Museums, UtF response)

‘There is a danger that some courses are driven by higher education institutions’ desire to maximise income rather than to address the needs of the sector... It is important to maximise practitioner input into museum-studies

courses... depth of knowledge of collections or the history/science/art behind them... is certainly something that cannot be provided through postgraduate museum-studies courses.' (Tyne and Wear Museums, UtF response)

'We do not think the answer is to create more post-graduate courses for the sector.' (V&A, UtF response)

'It is important to recognise the diversity within the sector. Museum training courses have their place, but one size does not fit all.' (Fitzwillian Museum, UtF response)

'There is a tendency towards [applicants] who are on paper over-qualified but may lack personal qualities or specialist practical skills, such as object-based skills.' (Sally Macdonald, University College London collections, symposium written comments)

'The existence of the courses has led to... museum people who have a sense of social and intellectual purpose. If they had not existed then we would have had more years of gentleman amateurism and antiquarianism... There are too many [but they] usually prove that the candidate is committed to the work and has theoretical understanding, usually linked to some work experience.' (Mark Suggitt, Bradford Museums, symposium written comments)

'A museum-studies qualification provides a good framework for a career in the profession. The problem is ...the profusion and variable quality of the courses on offer.... Courses seem to be too theoretical and packed with too many students... although 'an element of museological theory is necessary, the intellectual rigour we prize should be maintained. I would be a great supporter of cultural traineeships for either undergraduates or post A-level students... [to] provide opportunities for student and organisations alike.' (Tony Butler, Museum of East Anglian Life, symposium written comments)

'The model of [Diversify] traineeships could be rolled out for a wide range of new recruits to the profession. As the courses have become so academic and theoretical there is a real need for people to get a wide range of hands-on experience before they get channelled into one particular specialism. The Diversify trainees have been able to get a more rounded idea of what museums do – whereas when we appoint, say, an entry-level documentation assistant they might never have the opportunity to raise their eyes from the database and look at marketing and education – and before we know it they are making themselves entirely comfortable in their own little box... I also think it is useful to have someone in the museum who is involved in an academic course as they bring a different perspective... So win-win.' (Alex Walker, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, symposium written comments)

Good courses 'Provide a range of understanding and familiarisation if relevant work experience is lacking. [However] there are considerable differences in museum-studies qualifications and many students must be having their hopes raised by pursuing worthless qualifications...[If museum-studies courses didn't exist] we would probably have to greatly enhance induction programmes and

ensure that entry-level staff were not stuck in the first job they managed to get, but had a range of experience to enable them to develop their careers in a choice of directions.’ (Vanessa Trevelyan, Norfolk Museums, symposium written comments)

‘The useful things [museum-studies students] gain are an understanding of museology and a general experience of all areas. However, if they didn’t exist we would simply build the required elements into our induction process. [However, this would not be possible for] small and voluntary museums where graduates are very often single handedly running a museum. Without the courses these skills would be unavailable’ (Diane Lees, Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, symposium written comments)

‘Entry into the sector is difficult, with few opportunities for those who gain postgraduate qualifications. There are often no formal accreditation routes available for some areas of museum work; eg within the area of education. Volunteering (when available) is regularly undertaken to increase chances of employment... Often only short-term contract/seasonal work is available with no further training and development opportunities given. Routes into the sector need to be developed and expanded.’ (Scottish Museums Council, 2005)

There are particular problems with training and recruiting subject specialists

‘One of the frustrations experienced when recruiting, particularly to curatorial posts, is the dearth of specialist knowledge that exists, even amongst students with postgraduate museums and galleries studies qualifications. There is a real danger that this becomes a sector of ‘generalists’ who do not possess the necessary breadth, or depth of knowledge of collections or the history/science/art behind them. This is certainly something that cannot be provided through postgraduate museum-studies courses.’ (Tyne and Wear Museums, UtF response)

‘Particular potential exists for the creation of ‘apprenticeships’ with collections specialists, who would facilitate the acquisition of subject specific knowledge that is so wanting at present.’ (Tyne and Wear Museums, UtF response)

‘University College London’s experience... is that the best combination of pre-entry skills is a first degree in a relevant subject (which could for example include marketing or business studies as well as traditional disciplines such as art history), and a museum-studies course which includes a strong practical element as well as an overview of general issues of policy and strategy. Missing from this, however, is scholarship in particular types of collection, which tends not to form part of undergraduate courses or postgraduate vocational training. It is probably most appropriate for this kind of training to be provided post-entry, via development programmes for staff, the development of a research culture and through training provided perhaps by the subject specialist networks.’ (University College London, UtF response)

'In-service training is both patchy and incomplete and suffers from a want of investment in high-class expertise... there is a growing diminution in genuine subject expertise in such areas as naval and maritime history, as the old generalist [sc. specialist?] curators with frequently strong backgrounds in the subject, based often on professional expertise, make way for ostensibly better educated but relatively uninformed 'curatorial technocrats', whose expertise is in the generic transferable skills of museology and collections management, and not specialisms such as naval history, ships and the sea.' (Royal Naval Museum and Mary Rose Trust, UtF response)

'There is a danger of new bodies like the sector skills council concentrating on generic competences to the exclusion of subject knowledge.' (West Midlands Hub, UtF response)

'Greater opportunities to develop curatorial and research skills at first degree level need to be developed. The breadth of post-graduate courses... inevitably means that curatorial skills per se only form a small part of the curriculum... A closer emphasis on first-degree courses... that provide 'curatorial building blocks' for later post-graduate study would be beneficial. Museums could in their turn provide higher levels of access to relevant study/handling material for such courses. However, ... curatorial training needs to continue career-long, especially keeping up with new research.' (Tim Ambrose, UtF response)

There is a long way to go to diversify the workforce

'Positive-action traineeships... are only scratching the surface of the problem of an unrepresentative workforce.' (Tyne and Wear Museums, UtF response)

'The Diversify and Inspire schemes are producing small numbers... from minority ethnic groups, but more work needs to be done on under-representation in general.' (University College London, UtF response)

'It is quite common that those who work in museums, especially in the specialist areas of curation and conservation, have previously been attracted to museums through knowledge and contact gained through activities such as volunteering, either prior to further [sc higher?] education or during and after as interns... There is an opportunity to encourage volunteer contact from diverse communities.' (Museum of London, UtF response)

Some other points

'In some areas of museum work there is a wealth of qualified pre-entry candidates... But in many areas there are shortages. We need more investment in initial and mid-career training for museum and gallery educators.' (National Museum Directors' Conference, UtF response)

'Further analysis of training and skills needs... would help to identify training requirements and to target funding to solutions. We would like to see CCS undertake a strategic review of existing schemes and needs analyses and develop a clear action plan.' (National Trust, UtF response)

The over supply of museum-studies students 'is almost certainly playing its part in depressing wages and salaries at large.' (Royal Naval Museum and Mary Rose Trust, UtF response)

'Recruiting for education, exhibitions and some curatorial staff ...at the lowest grade in our structure, we attract a large number of candidates (40-90), some of whom are genuinely at entry-level, ie applying for first job, but many of whom are currently doing similar jobs elsewhere and have 2-5 years experience. We tend to recruit the more experienced candidates.' Virginia Tandy, (Manchester Art Galleries, symposium written comments)

Managers need training in staff development. (V&A, UtF response)

'There is a responsibility to ensure that new staff at entry-level have induction and a personal development review, accompanied by an annual training plan' (Heather Broughton, Leicestershire Museums, symposium written comments)

'I've always found that one gets stronger fields for entry-level posts than more senior ones, with people quite capable of doing the senior posts only applying for junior ones, underestimating their abilities or perhaps not wanting greater responsibility.' (Sally Macdonald, University College London, symposium written comments)

2 Comments from individuals

In the first couple of months of my investigation I wrote a short Museums Journal letter about my research into entry into the profession, and a related story on the MA website. In response I received over 20 comments from individuals in entry-level jobs, or on university courses. As my work progressed I received further comments from individuals. Obviously, they're a self-selecting group, but some common themes appear. All individuals have been anonymised

Museums demand Masters qualifications – but are they really necessary?

KC is a current student on a museum-studies MA: 'An MA seems to be crucial to moving forward. Just looking through the jobs pages in Museums Journal, something like 25% to 50% of adverts request this qualification.'

LT works in museums: 'I learnt most of what I need to know and currently use from my voluntary experience rather than my MA, and my having an aptitude and belief system that is compatible with the current climate and work. I would even go so far as to suggest that it may not actually [be] necessary for museum professionals to be so highly (and traditionally) educated and... I wonder whether it might be time to consider a modern apprenticeship route as well. New entrants would start at 16 or 18 and be trained to A-level or above within the workplace.'

NS has a successful museum career: 'I received my modern apprenticeship in cultural heritage around 8 years ago, as part of the excellent training provided by the Wordsworth Trust [but] it was not recognised by any of those organisations to whom I applied [all museums and galleries]. The overwhelming piece of feedback I got was that I had to do an MA to be in with a chance of getting an interview, or to be taken seriously... Therefore I did have to... do my MA. Interestingly, I would say that I still use a lot of what I learnt at the Wordsworth Trust in my work, but I actually don't fall back on my MA course much at all. So, I think the sector needs to accept more diversity in terms of types of qualifications and experience... If we really want to be socially inclusive, we have to legitimise the cultural values of others, the diversity of skills and different ways of entering the sector, otherwise museums will always have overtones of elitism.'

ST got her first job without having a museum-studies masters. She chose not to do one, instead opting for a unit (G3) of a cultural heritage NVQ, 'which seemed a bit of a step backwards but was actually very helpful in allowing me to identify and prove the skills I had learnt on the job. I used this when applying for my current position.'

SS has a masters in museum studies from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand and has been unsuccessful in securing museum employment in the UK, where she now lives (and has a visa that allows her to work): 'Where is the cap on museum-studies courses and places when there aren't the paid jobs? ... I have already done hundreds of hours of unpaid labour and internships, both in NZ and UK. I have concluded that the MA in museum studies is essentially a way of keeping those who lecture in employment (while they essentially misrepresent your chance of employment in the profession after you finish your qualification), while providing museums with highly skilled unpaid labourers with no concrete, long-term forms of employment. Meanwhile the positions advertised in the Museums Journal nearly always specify more long-term work experience in the profession than I have. [I am now considering retraining or] looking for paid employment in another sector.'

BS is a recent museum-studies graduate who is 'now lucky enough to have a job... Having finished my course 7 months ago I am amazed at the number of people who upon completing an essentially vocational course have had to go in a completely different direction. These people are passionate, highly intelligent and would be an asset to the heritage sector.'

Some people considering museum careers are deterred at an early stage, often because of the cost of training and volunteering

'I have supervised two work-experience placements, who have now got jobs in the private sector... because they found entry into museums was a) too difficult and b) incompatible with their current situations, being engaged to be married and looking for property with partners.' (LT)

'I am ... very aware that I could not be here without the financial and moral support of my family... If you step back to look at it, it is pretty illogical to not only forgo up to seven years of earning, but to actually pay thousands of pounds to get you there, and then to have no guarantee of a job, a salary that you could easily earn with a few basic admin qualifications... and very little respect, just for the love of it! It's no wonder that many would be unwilling to go through all that, and that families who have scrimped and saved all their lives to give their children a better future should expect a bit more for their efforts than an airy-fairy notion of self-sacrifice for the greater good... I think it takes one or two generations of living in comfort to produce someone brave enough to do a job for the love of it.' (LT)

'Working as a volunteer is good in that it gives more experience of doing different parts of the job, but it is difficult financially. I ended up having to work in a supermarket at evenings and weekends ... I was lucky in that I was able to move back home so did not have to pay rent.' (LS)

Museums could take more responsibility for entry-level training

'I tend to agree with all those who suggest more in-house and on-the-job training.' (LT)

'There is ... a major problem when looking for an opening job that someone expects you to have worked professionally for a few years for a start up job. (Why should you need a few years experience for a start up job?) Surely... museums should introduce more training posts!' (QC)

'Employers should be more willing to train graduates 'on the job' rather than expecting them to have a lot of experience. Perhaps a scheme of paid internships could be offered, rather than voluntary work?'

'Some form of internship would be the way forward...A system of summer internships could be established, taking young people, of whatever background, from schools colleges and universities, into museums to gain the structured experience offered by postgraduate courses. Not only would this help people decide whether the job is really for them, but I believe you stand a better chance of diversifying the workforce if you begin recruitment during compulsory education.' (KC)

AN took a museum-studies course as a career changer. She also has two years voluntary experience. 'I expected a full-time job on graduation; instead I was employed on a three-month contract... and I am out again looking for work... From my own feelings of frustration and confusion over how things work within the museum sector I believe strongly that anyone offering to volunteer, with considerable skills, should be made aware that there is, *or is not*, likely to be a post at the end of their term as a volunteer. Otherwise false expectations can arise, as in my case.'

TF is a frustrated museum-studies graduate. 'The museums sector seems to no longer know what the institutions are teaching... Museums no longer seem to know exactly what they need from employees, and this becomes filtered into their job advertisements. There needs to be a clarification of roles in museums... It is not the student's fault that they are not getting the appropriate training and yet it is us who are paying the price. Experience is the key but it has to be made available to all students by higher education institutions working together with museums.'

People are leaving the sector because it's too hard to progress and because of short-term contracts

ME got a museum-studies MA in 2003: 'I do not know how long I can realistically stay in [my current entry-level] position... I am 28 years old, intelligent and capable, have spent vast amounts on my education and yet am earning [£11,000] just above the minimum wage. However I am sure that if I did leave there would be many eager entry level museum [studies masters] graduates ready to jump into the post because there are no proper jobs in the sector.'

MC has an MPhil (not in museum studies) and an NVQ in cultural heritage: 'I have only been able to stay in my current post as long as I have (3 years) because my husband has a well paid job. However my contract is due to end at the beginning of April and I have not seen a single [suitable] job advertised for several months. I am going to have to leave the profession as I really cannot see any future in it for me and I feel bitterly disappointed and let down by this as I have worked so hard and gained a lot of experience, but it still seems to lead to nothing. [There is a] dreadful waste of talent... in the sector.'

LS got a museum-studies masters in 2002, worked as a volunteer for a year and is now in a fixed-term post. 'The profession seems to be suffering from a high drop-out rate at entry level. I myself am considering moving out of the sector into administration. This seems a waste, especially spending an extra year studying, and considering the cost of the MA and the degree.... From the students that I know of on my course, I would say that over half are no longer working in museums. From my own circle of friends, one has retrained and is now a teacher, one has retrained and is now an accountant, and another works in marketing.'

'I will not be able to stay in the profession for my entire working time, since my personal life may have to take priority: pensions and buying a house, plans I cannot make yet because of consistent [short-term] contracts one after another.' (MD)

To cope you need to be committed and feel lucky, even grateful

'I am deeply committed and passionate about what I do' (ME)

'On completing my MA it took three months to get a job – and I always recognised that I was one of the lucky ones. My job was a year's contract... I am still working on rolling yearly contracts which means even if I did have a hope of buying property on my salary, I couldn't anyway because the job is not permanent.' (LT)

IC is a qualified primary teacher and has a museum-studies masters: 'The post is part-time, thus money is tight. The way I see it though is that on my non-working days I can either start to develop freelance projects... or go back to volunteering to increase my experience in other areas. The job is permanent so I have no intention of looking for another post for a while, I consider myself lucky to be in post considering the stories that you hear.'

JL 'was unfortunate enough to spend time and effort getting a masters degree that I now don't even bother including on my CV. I currently work as a marketing administrator within the private sector, after three years of desperately trying to secure that elusive entry-level museum position...with the benefit of hindsight, my choice of course was the root of my problems. I enrolled on a Masters degree course that claimed to be "vocational" and taught by people who had worked in the industry, when in actual fact very few had ever been on a museum payroll. These same tutors dished out advice

such as “you won’t need voluntary work because you’ll have a masters degree.’ Wet behind the ears, I consequently strove for high academic standards, spending time in the library rather than getting some real museum experience... Courses that offer little practical experience... should simply be shut down... I’ve witnessed how easy it is for a sub-standard course to pull the wool over CHNTO’s eyes or those of any other validating body. Tutors and course leaders turn on the charm and ensure that those assessing the course only speak to those students who are guaranteed to make a glowing recommendation... It’s not good asking students to make an assessment of a course while they’re studying on it. There’s too much pressure from tutors to say and do the right thing. Students are naturally wary that if they say anything negative their marks will suffer...’

Things are particularly hard for people from poorer backgrounds

QC took an *undergraduate* heritage course. ‘When I started university, the first thing we were told was “only two or three out of the 30 [students on the course] will get a job in the heritage industry”... For a university to [have to tell its students] that jobs in the sector are rare and employment unlikely is frankly wrong!’

On completing the course it became clear his best option was to do a masters in museum studies, but ‘coming from a ‘working class’ background, and being in the first year of the new student tuition fees, I could not support myself through education any longer than I had. Throughout my educational career, basically since I was 15, I had had a job to earn money and support my education. I would dearly have loved to have applied for a post-graduate course, but the cost of these was totally out of my grasp. I was told I could take another loan out to support fees and living expenses, but already being in £20,000+ of debt, I could not justify another £6-8,000 for a career [in which] I would be lucky to earn £20,000 for possibly the first five years, it just wouldn’t make sense... Think about people like me, and there are many, who get to a point and hit a wall because they cannot afford to join the ‘elitist’ postgraduate schemes.’

He got a job as a manager for Tesco, successfully, but recently left to take up a one-year contract museum job – dropping ‘a safe and valued career so I could work – even if only for a year – in the sector I have loved since I can remember... I hope [this] will lead to another job in the museum sector, if not... I would no doubt get a job back in the private sector, and easily earn more money, but what will the [museum] industry lose?’

QE says the sector should think about ‘creating and promoting BA and BSc courses that can lead to entry-level recruitment at the larger... institutions, using routes and resources in these institutions to allow vocational ‘on the job’ postgraduate qualifications to be gained.... [Without this] more and more people [who can’t afford postgraduate course fees] will fall through the net, and so more and more new ideas and energetic drive and enthusiasm will be lost. Postgraduate courses [are] fine, but when everyone comes out with the

same idea, how will the museum sector ever grasp the future and engage the people it's there to serve?'

NQ is doing a museum-studies course by distance learning: 'I live in a poor and deprived area... I wanted to work in a museum and do the course – but there is a total lack of even basic part-time casual positions that can help support you... I feel apprenticeships are needed for people like me – I particularly enjoy collections, documenting and cataloguing yet I feel people like me are passed by and ignored and the opportunities especially in poor areas are limited. The costs of courses are also huge (£844 per module)... they may have elite ideas on what should be taught [and] essays have to be written in a certain way and often don't measure what you have learnt... There is a lack of... foundation courses... and apprenticeships.'

KM works in a junior position in a museum-support organisation. 'I come from a C2DE background... and was the first in my family to do A-levels.' She has a MA in cultural heritage studies 'To fund my MA I applied for a career development loan, which coming from a low income household was quite a daunting prospect. I also stayed at home rent free which was quite hard for my mum... I applied for hardship funds despite working full time during summer, Easter and Christmas breaks... An entry-level museum job... was not suitable as it wouldn't have covered my loan repayments and my living costs... I have long felt that a scheme should be set up to enable people from low income... groups to gain entry into museums as a career either through MA courses, apprenticeships or other on the job training.'

'The problem is not a new one... The careers advice I had from school [in 1995] was negative... I studied with the Open University for eight years to acquire my BA...I did a cleaning job in a factory to pay my way... While still at sixth form I became a volunteer in my local museum and have continued ever since, even when I finally achieved my childhood dream [of a job in museums]. I left full-time education at 19, but it wasn't until I was 28 that I finally managed it... Finally my waiting and persistence paid off but I knew I needed postgraduate qualifications, which I achieved. It hasn't been easy, but if I had my time again I wouldn't change anything. My biggest worry at the moment is when I have to find another job; the goal posts have moved so much that I fear I shall never get another one and all those years would have been wasted.' (VQ)

A few other points

'[On my masters course] no indication was given that finding a job would not be simple, mainly due to the sheer weight of numbers of graduates with the same qualifications... there are not enough entry level jobs to go round!... The number of places should be reduced on each.' (LS)

'Even though I enjoyed my time at [university] and loved studying the [museum-studies masters] course, I am still very angry with the university... for taking on so many students of museum studies each year and never once

mentioning to us that it was unlikely we would get a paying job in a related field at the end of it. I am also angry towards a profession that claims to value social inclusion and diversity, yet discriminates against people who cannot afford financially to spend years volunteering in unpaid posts.’ (ED)

KB got work as a curatorial museum assistant at a major national museum a few months after completing her undergraduate degree. After a few months voluntary work at a smaller museum ‘I had written to my tutors in Oxford and to people I had subsequently worked with [in Oxford], asking if they knew of anyone who could point me in the right direction, as it seemed silly not to take advantage of potential networking opportunities... I was given a contact at the [national] museum, and soon began volunteering, fitting it around [paid part-time work elsewhere.] I really enjoyed working in the department and when a museum assistant vacancy came up I was determined to submit a great application... To my great delight I got that job... Although I was offered a couple of places for museum studies MAs, I decided not to take these up (for now at least). The chance to learn while in employment was too good to pass up, and in any case another year of full-time education would not guarantee that this opportunity will come up again. I’d quite like the solid grounding a masters would bring, but for now the priority is most definitely employment and practical experience... I think I’ve been very lucky in finding a full-time, permanent museum post so soon... On the other hand, I have been very single-minded about what I wanted to do, working hard and making the most of opportunities and contacts... It does, of course, help immeasurably that I have been able to live with family in London, and that my parents have been able to assist me financially while I was volunteering and working only part time.’

‘The employers seem to be asking too much for the salaries which are offered. Most jobs require an MA, a degree, relevant work experience and detailed collections knowledge, all for £16,000 a year (or less in the case of some documentation jobs)... A lot of posts are offered on fixed-term contracts... This makes it hard to relocate, so one has to commute, and also makes it hard to obtain mortgages, pay into a pension plan etc.’ (LS)

‘All there is for people like me, who are early on in their career, is [short-term] contracts. I was determined to join the profession during my education, but having finally got here some aspects of it [are] rather disheartening: competition for jobs that pay too little to someone who is way over-qualified, as well as lack of job security.’ (MD)

ED took an MA in museum studies: ‘After finishing the MA course I applied for entry-level museum jobs all across the UK and carried on volunteering... near home... I did this for a year and a half before giving up my dream, which by now was a real nightmare, and taking a graduate job in... accountancy. This was the first non-museum job I applied for and I think this proves the skills, education and experience I have were valued much more highly by other sectors. I come from a modest background... and could not afford to spend so long out of paid employment. Aside from the huge financial pressure, however, the worst thing about the situation was how depressed I was... My

confidence took a huge knock and I was confused as to why even though I had done plenty of volunteer work and had the education to back that up, still nobody wanted to hire me. It was an awful time for me and I am certain that hundreds of museum-studies graduates are going through the same thing every year... I believe that my confidence in my professional capabilities has still... to return to what it once was because of my long period of unpaid work... I wanted to highlight... what a damaging effect the situation can have on people's mental health.'

Having completed her university-based training FX is trying to find employment as a conservator: Meanwhile she is working in another area of museum work. 'Traineeships/paid internships would be of great benefit... Not all of us were born with a silver spoon and could afford to spend [our] summer breaks volunteering, so paid work experience would go down very well!... Every great conservator needs a successor and support and opportunities need to exist from the minute we [students] hand in our final projects... Thank you for the work that you are doing. It means a lot to us "recent" graduates.'

HT has an MPhil in Archaeological Heritage and Museums: 'I have been shortlisted and interviewed for several posts, though was let down by not having the apparently mandatory "two or three years experience". I do have experience of volunteering, and academic knowledge behind me, yet museums are failing to offer reasonable ways into first museum jobs... I am back at home, attempting to gain experience for a job which may never materialise, and if it does, may not guarantee either longevity or a worthy salary. This lack of faith in the future of my career and the sector itself, and a loss of personal confidence post-university, are factors which, after a life-long interest in the past and heritage, are prompting me (and some of my peers) to look elsewhere for employment. I thank you for undertaking this research – you will be championing the cause of a great many deflated, but still passionate (and capable) young people.'

MN is employed as a curator and is doing the AMA: 'Having taken part in volunteer schemes before qualifying and having real problems getting a job, I feel that the links between universities and museums aren't particularly useful... I am one of the lucky ones who managed to get a permanent contract for my first job, but I know many [museum-studies graduates] who haven't... Now it is interesting to be on the other side, taking on volunteers and trying to make their experiences as meaningful as possible.'

KC is a museum-studies student: 'I attended the conference on material culture at Leicester this week, where I talked about the issue of entry-level recruitment with others, both students and professionals. We agreed that two of the problems are the exploitation of a profitable niche market by universities, and an apparent lack of progression from entry-level jobs.'

MX is a museum-studies student: 'Courses provide a solid foundation of theoretical knowledge on which to base practical experience. Furthermore, many universities offering the course already have a close working relationship with museums... [However,] museums need to take some

responsibility for the development of their staff. If employees and potential employees are unaware of future career options the museums should do something about it. I never once saw a representative from the museum sector at a careers fair. You cannot blame employees or the students enrolling in museum-studies courses for the current situation when the information is not made widely available.'

NT has just completed a museum-studies MA: 'I and thousands of students like me are trying to keep up with [the museum sector's] constantly shifting goalposts, which would be fine if the goalposts were fixed across the whole museum community, [but] if you can't agree where they are, what chance have we of finding them?... The current position seems to be "Museum-studies MA students with no paid museum experience need not apply"... This particular student is sick and tired of working all hours for a [distance learning] qualification that I am being told is worthless by the very profession in which the degree specialises... In fact my particular university offers these degrees on the basis that they are approved by the MA as a professional qualification... My suggestion for all those considering taking a museum studies MA is this: ask some very awkward questions and think long and hard before spending your cash and taking the course.'

SB enjoys her museum-studies course: 'In an ideal world paid traineeships would be valuable to any person lucky enough to find one... [but] I must express my own satisfaction with the museum-studies course I am participating in... not only do we undertake a 2-month placement... but we have input throughout the course from professionals, outside of university staff... In addition to this we have dedicated university lecturers with a deep interest in the field and our success... Initial exploration into the field of employment has verified that my MA is both practical and worthwhile. I am determined to succeed within the field and my MA has set me in good stead to do so.'