Diversify Destination Research

The impact of the Diversify scheme on participants’ careers 1998-2011

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Key points

Of minority-ethnic people who participated in the Diversify scheme and responded to a survey:

- 90% gained work in museums after completing Diversify training
- 74% were still working in the museum sector at the time of the survey
- 61% were working in museum management or are on track to work in museum management, the key long-term aim of the Diversify scheme
- 98% felt that Diversify had either been ‘very important’ or ‘important’ to them starting a career in the museum sector
- All management-level trainees secured employment in museums soon after completing training

1 Introduction

The Museums Association’s Diversify scheme ran from 1998 until 2011. It set out to make museum careers more accessible to people from Black, Asian and Minority-Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds through targeted ‘positive-action’ training to prepare them to apply successfully for jobs in museums. In particular, it sought to ensure that in the longer term there were more minority-ethnic people who were qualified as potential applicants for mid- and senior-level management positions in museums.

The majority of people participating in the Diversify scheme were from BAME backgrounds and at entry-level. However, in its 13-year life the scheme included management-level traineeships and training for people with disabilities and for people from low-income households. This report summarises research into participants’ experiences of the scheme and their subsequent career paths. It concentrates on BAME participants, but includes brief discussion of other aspects of the scheme.

2 Development of the Diversify scheme

“Ethnic minorities are clearly under-represented in the museum workforce.”

Museum Training Institute 1993

First steps

In the 1990s there were comments in Museums Journal and elsewhere about the under-representation of BAME people in museum jobs (summarised in Davies and Shaw 2010, 148-149). The first data on the ethnic profile of the workforce, published in 1993, concluded, “Ethnic minorities are clearly under-represented in the museum workforce as a whole.”
The Museums Association launched the Diversify positive-action training scheme in 1998. It began modestly with just two places on offer, thanks to partnership support and funding in the first year from the University of Leicester and the Museums Association, with help from Nottingham Museums. Over the next two years, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded four participants. In addition, a few museums funded positive-action training, particularly Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery. Diversify participants typically trained for 1-2 years, combining a university museum-studies masters qualification with a varied amount of paid work experience.

Renaissance boost
Renaissance in the Regions started funding Diversify in 2002 and became the major funder, contributing a total of almost £1m up to 2011, when Diversify formally ended. By that time 110 people from BAME backgrounds benefited from the Diversify scheme and had access to the Museums Association’s full range of Diversify support, which included networking, workshops and mentoring. The Museums Association also supported organisations hosting trainees with advice, training seminars, staff briefing sessions and the Diversify Toolkit.

Diversify participants were getting entry-level positions in museums and galleries, but they were naturally taking time to progress. In 2005, David Lammy, the Minister for Culture, complained, “At the present rate of change it will be decades before we see real change in the diversity of the workforce at all levels”. In 2006, Diversify introduced management-level traineeships, also thanks to Renaissance funding, and by 2010 had recruited six BAME individuals who wanted to enter museum work and had management experience and transferable skills from elsewhere.

Diversifying Diversify
In 2008, the Museums Association worked with the University of Leicester, Colchester & Ipswich Museum Service and Shape (an organisation that links disabled people with the arts) to pilot the first Bill Kirby traineeship for deaf and disabled people. (Some of the funds came from the Museums and Galleries Disability Association, in which Bill Kirby had played a leading role.) Diversify went on to recruit four further Bill Kirby entry-level trainees and one management-level Bill Kirby trainee.

There was growing desire to create entry routes into the museum workforce as an alternative to university museum-studies masters courses and there was growing concern that most people who work in museums were predominantly from relatively affluent backgrounds (Davies 2007). In response, the Museums Association introduced a new model of purely work-based entry-level training aimed at people from low-income households.

In two further initiatives in 2010-11, the Museums Association ran the Next Step Grant scheme to support the professional development of BAME people and people with disabilities already working in the sector. In addition, the Support and Challenge programme helped regional hub museums to develop their workforce diversification plans through a network of advisors (Davies and Wilkinson 2011).

Throughout its life, as well as funding from Renaissance in the Regions through the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, Diversify had tremendous support from museums and galleries hosting (and sometimes funding) placements and traineeships, from universities, from the Museums Association and from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
3 BAME Participants in the Diversify scheme

The questionnaire
In June 2011, participants in Diversify were invited to complete an online questionnaire to explore their experiences. There were 43 responses from BAME individuals, representing 39% of the total Diversify BAME cohort of 110 people. (There were also responses from individuals from the 2010 traineeships for people from low income households; these responses are analysed separately.) As is often the case with surveys of this type, it is not possible to know whether the questionnaire respondents are representative of the entire cohort. This uncertainty means some of the data reported here should be approached with caution. Reassuringly, a separate study of the first 30 diversify participants found a similar proportion of people still working in museums.¹

The responses offer fascinating insights into people’s experiences of training, securing initial employment (or not) and their career progression. Respondents were given the choice of having their comments attributed to them, or of remaining anonymous. Therefore some comments reported below are not attributed to a named individual.

Who participated in Diversify? Gender, age and educational background
Most people responding to the survey are female (86%). By comparison, 84% of UK full-time students on museum-studies courses were female in 2005/6 (Davies 2007, 38).

80% were under 30 years old when they entered the Diversify scheme. Most of those over 30 were management-level trainees.

When they started Diversify, over half of participants had an upper second undergraduate degree and 16% held a postgraduate qualification. The great majority studied a humanities subject. Just three BAME people (7%) did not have a university-level qualification.

Therefore, participants in the Diversify scheme were typically under 30, female and with a humanities degree: apart from their ethnicity, similar to others seeking work in museums (Davies 2007, 38, 69).

Ethnicity
The ethnicity of survey respondents is shown in table 1

Table 1 Ethnicity of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian and Asian/White</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black and Black/White</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese and Chinese/White</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual other or not specified</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previous museum experience
Competition for jobs means that very few people enter the workforce without previous voluntary work or paid casual work. To a degree, Diversify countered this: a third of survey respondents had no voluntary experience in museums before applying to the scheme. (30% of people had paid work experience in museums before they joined Diversify, the great majority part-time in roles such as visitor services.)

¹Heywood 2010 found that of the first 30 people to participate in the Diversify scheme from 1999-2005, 18 were still working in the museum sector in 2010 and a further three in the wider arts or heritage sector. That is, 60-70%. Our research found 74% still working in museums (see Table 3 below).
4 Training and gaining employment

“I got a good curatorial job that I wouldn't have been able to get without the experience gained on the traineeship. The academic/practical balance set me up very well for the role.”

Training routes
The 110 people from BAME backgrounds who participated in the Diversify scheme between 1998 and 2010 took one of four training routes.

Most followed either:

i) a Diversify bursary, which offered funding for a university masters in museum studies and a short paid placement in a museum or gallery (44%); or

ii) a more substantial Diversify traineeship, which provided a two-year paid placement in a museum or gallery and a part-time masters in museum studies (47%).

A small number followed:

iii) a variant based on National Vocational Qualifications (2%); or

iv) a workplace-based management-level traineeship (7%).

Gaining initial employment

As shown in table 2, around three quarters of respondents gained employment in museums within six months of completing their training. About half got their first paid job at a museum where they had not worked or volunteered before, with slightly fewer employed at a museum that had hosted their traineeship. The survey found little difference in success rates between people training under entry-level traineeships or bursaries. All responding management-level trainees were successful in gaining work in the sector more-or-less immediately.

Table 2 Speed with which BAME Diversify participants found employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time taken to secure museum work/Prior museum experience</th>
<th>Under 6 months</th>
<th>Under 6 months %</th>
<th>Over 6 months</th>
<th>Over 6 months %</th>
<th>Outside sector or un employed</th>
<th>Outside sector or un employed %</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>42*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n=42 as one respondent had not completed training at time of responding to survey

Satisfaction with first job
The survey asked respondents “Was your first job in a museum after the traineeship at the level you hoped for?” The majority of respondents (20) said that it was. Aysha Afridi wrote, “I was very pleased to get a job working with local communities as I felt this was making the most of my skills.” Tonya Nelson, a management-level trainee, was pleased to get “a strategic senior position that gave me leadership experience”.

About a third of respondents were only partially satisfied with their first job. One said, “It was a good stepping stone. The job was good but I wasn't completely engaged with the collection and subject matter.” Within six months she had moved on to something that suited her better.
Unfortunately, a few people did not get a job in museums (some of these were less than a year on from completing their training when they responded to the survey). One explained, “I managed to get some interviews but every time I could not compete in level of experience.” Another chose academia instead of museums, which she thought were “offering poor opportunities with low pay and limited career progression. As an academic though, I still try, where possible, to work alongside and support the museum sector.”

5 Views of the Diversify Scheme

“The fact that you applied for it formally, were contracted and worked towards a qualification, gave it an integrity that UK internships often don't have.”

When asked how important participating in the Diversify scheme had been to starting a career in the sector survey respondents (apart from one person who said ‘don’t know’) were uniformly positive:

- 70% reported it had been ‘very important’,
- 28% stated it had been ‘important’

Most respondents commented that they wouldn’t be working in the sector without participating in Diversify. In the words of one anonymous respondent: “I have no doubt that if I hadn’t taken place in the Diversify scheme I wouldn’t be where I am today. It has given me so many experiences, and knowledge and helped my network.”

Extending a welcome

The Museums Association intended that Diversify would encourage people from BAME backgrounds to consider a museum career, as Briony Benge-Abbott describes, “Discovering that a scheme like Diversify existed greatly encouraged me to consider working in museums - it demonstrated to me that the museum sector welcomed and wanted people ‘like me’ to work within it and help open the sector to other non-traditional users.”

The cost of training and voluntary work

The cost of postgraduate museum-studies training and the prevalence of pre-entry voluntary work are barriers to many potential entrants to the sector. Diversify helped people overcome this. Amisha Karia said, “Without the Diversify scheme I would not have been able to afford to do the [masters in museum studies], which led to my first job in museums, which ... I love.” An anonymous person said, “I couldn't have financially afforded to volunteer for so long in order to get the experience required to get a good job in the sector.”

Work-based training and professional development

Several respondents identified the value of practical work-based learning, “Without the Diversify scheme I don’t think I would have gained the practical experience which is so often needed to secure an interview.” Hannah Phung valued Diversify’s professional development programme, “The networking events, workshops and support to attend events have been invaluable to me in developing my career.”

Wider impacts

Diversify exposed museums to new people. Joanna Mitchell said, “I always saw the scheme about bringing people who are different with new ideas and ways of doing things. Even though I was unable to remain in the sector I feel I had an impact on my colleagues’ perceptions and expectations on how to do things another way that they had not explored before. Also I felt that I encouraged others to strive to do more challenging innovative exhibitions. In that way I still made an impact even though I am no longer in the sector for the moment.”
**The issue of low income**

Questions have been asked about the appropriateness of positive-action training based on race alone when there is also the problem of accessibility of museum work to people from low-income households. Several survey respondents commented on this. Amal Kreisheh reflected, “I think that the major factor that prevents candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds from entering the museums profession is lack of financial resources. In my view, ethnicity is not a restriction to entry into the profession; however, lack of financial resources is. For this reason, I think that traineeships should be offered to all candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds irrespective of their ethnicity.” In its final phase Diversify did offer training to people from low-income backgrounds, as discussed below.

6 Career progression

“I am very pleased with how my career is progressing. I would like to be an established curator or manager. I am very positive about reaching my goal.”

The key aim of the Diversify was to ensure that in the longer term, people from BAME backgrounds were in a position to apply for mid- and senior-level jobs in the museum sector. The key success measure for the scheme is, then, the extent to which participants have progressed in their careers towards museum management. Encouragingly, of respondents to the survey, over 60% are either already working in museum management or working in a museum job with the potential to progress to management. More details can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 Employment of BAME Diversify trainees (at time of responding to survey in June 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under a year on from completing Diversify and not yet in a graduate level post</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No work in museums*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked in museums but has now left sector**</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in museums, unlikely to progress to management***</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in museums with management potential ****</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in museum management</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation of categories in Table 3

*Did not obtain a paid job in museums and is more than one year on from completing Diversify training

**Or is still working in sector but has firmly decided to leave sector

***For example because has not obtained a graduate-level position

****Employed in a graduate-level job and either has progressed in terms of career level so that potentially could apply for management jobs now or in future or expresses firm aspiration for management-level work.
A few respondents explained why they are not working in museums. For example, Ami Amlani became an education visits officer at the Houses of Parliament and says, “Even though I do not work in a museum, I often draw upon my knowledge of culture, heritage and object-based learning theories from the MA museum studies. I hope to return museum education, should an opportunity arise at the right time.”

In contrast an anonymous Asian Pakistani woman cannot afford to work in museums, “I would still like to be in the sector but do not see that happening. I have found it very difficult to find a suitable position that pays me enough to leave my daughter and go to work and also something with a commutable distance in Yorkshire. I would like to return to the sector but not sure if it will happen. Considering a career such as teaching that fits in better with my lifestyle.”

Many are well on the way to management positions. Amisha Karia completed her Diversify training in 2006 and now works as galleries officer at University of Hertfordshire Galleries. She wrote, “I am very pleased with how my career is progressing. It has been recently been moved forward through the help of the Next Step Grant. [In five years] I would like to be an established curator or manager. I am very positive about reaching my goal.”

Briony Benge-Abbot completed Diversify in 2010 and is exhibitions officer at Brent Museums and Archives in London. She commented, “I would like to have a more senior position within a medium-sized museum, perhaps somewhere outside of the UK. I feel pretty positive about my ability to achieve this goal, the combination of the Diversify scheme and the AMA have really supported and helped me to develop key skills and networks.”

Several people are having successful careers, perhaps on their second or third job since completing Diversify training but feel uncertain about their future, as in the case of this anonymous respondent, “I think it’s time for me to move on, but there’s nowhere for me to go to!! I might need to rein in my professional ambitions or look to other sectors, depending on what transferable skills I have to offer.”

And some are very successful, already in museum management positions and looking to progress. Here are a couple of anonymous examples:

- “[In five years] I would like to be the director of a small museums trust. I am looking for an MBA to improve my qualifications. I would like to further develop my management and networking skills.”

- “Having worked on a large capital project I wanted to see it through to completion, however, while the role gave me great experiences and skills I feel I may have stayed in the role for too long. I know where I want to go but I am still finding my path towards getting there. [In five years] I would like to be a head of a department or deputy director.”

There does not appear to be a difference in career progression between people who followed the Diversify bursary route or the Diversify traineeship route. The bursary model of training cost around £12,500 per person, while the traineeship model cost about three times as much at £36,000 (Davies and Shaw 2010, 170). This suggests that the bursary model offered best value for money in terms of the primary strategic aim of the Diversify scheme of getting BAME people into mid- and senior-level positions. However, traineeships may have a greater impact on the host museum.
7 People from lower-income households

“Diversify made me feel good about the sector I was working in, knowing that schemes are available for people from a wide range of backgrounds.”

The final 2010-11 Diversify traineeships were aimed at people who were on a low-income, who came from a less affluent background and who may not have had a family tradition of higher education or professional work. Over 200 applied for six places. Four of the six successful trainees under completed questionnaires. All four were from a White background and all had a first degree or postgraduate qualification. None had previously undertaken paid work in museums although two had volunteered. Two secured work immediately after completing their traineeships, one person went on to do a PhD and the fourth person gained employment three months after completing the questionnaire. All four are pleased to have chosen a career in the museum sector and say Diversify has been very important to starting a career in the museum sector. Damon Waldock commented that Diversify “also made me feel good about the sector I was working in, knowing that schemes are available for people from a wide range of backgrounds. It has only been a year, but I have developed in many areas..., built confidence and know where I want my professional career to go. Thank you to everyone that has helped me while on the scheme. Even though it has recently ended I still feel a big part of it.”

8 Was Diversify a success?

“The Museums Association created a wonderful scheme. I hope that museums and galleries the country over will be able to self-sustain the work and continue to keep a diverse workforce.”

The Diversify scheme started with a simple aim – to increase the accessibility of museum careers to BAME people, with a longer term aspiration that they should be in a position to apply for mid- and senior-level jobs in the museum sector.

Diversify was therefore primarily about individuals – equipping people with the skills, knowledge and experience they needed to compete successfully for museum jobs. And from that point of view it has been a success. Over 90% of participants gained employment in the sector, with the majority indicating that their first job was what they had hoped for. 98% of respondents felt that Diversify had either been ‘very important’ or ‘important’ to them starting a career in the museum sector. Almost 20% are now working in museum management and the careers of over 40% have progressed to a point where they have management potential. From this evidence it seems fair to conclude that for those individuals who responded to the questionnaire, Diversify has been a personal success.

A group of passionate, creative diverse individuals, many of whom previously doubted whether they would get a job in the sector, are now working in it and are making a difference. But 100 or so individuals are not enough to fundamentally shift the sector’s demographics and the museum workforce is still far less racially diverse than the UK population (Davies and Shaw 2010).

In general positive-action training is not intended to have an immediate impact, but to create long-term changes in the workforce. Diversify showed museums the benefits of having a more diverse workforce, as Sandy Nairne,
director of the National Portrait Gallery, explained to Museums Journal, “Diversify has been very influential in allowing existing staff to see people from different backgrounds and this has helped to change thinking” (Heywood 2010b, 30). In 2009, a major review of Renaissance in the Regions found that “people and organisations actively involved in the [Diversify] scheme ...believe that the programme has substantial impact and benefits far beyond individual training” (Porter, 2009, p.22).

But there remains an enormous amount to do. Gemma Dhami commented, “Diversifying the sector is something that I feel was important, and still is. The Museums Association created a wonderful scheme that has helped many into something that may never have been possible, and I feel it a great shame that is no longer continuing. I hope that museums and galleries the country over will be able to self-sustain the work and continue to keep a diverse work force.”

Further reading


Museums Association, 2012

24 Calvin St London E1 6NW

www.museumsassociation.org/diversify