

# Manifesto for the Future of Museums

*A challenge from emerging museum  
professionals*

Edited by Rachel Souhami

# Introduction

In twenty years' time the people who are now early career museum professionals will be running the museums sector. What do they want that sector to look like? This manifesto sets out the ideas, visions and aspirations of the 65 early career professionals who participated in the Future of Museums conference, which took place at UCL on 3 April 2014.

The premise of the conference was quite simple: it was a chance for those within six years of their first museum job to voice their views on the future of their profession. After all, as future museum directors, funders and policy makers, now is the ideal time to discuss what kind of sector they want to inherit, and to forge the alliances and networks that will make that happen. We wanted this to be an opportunity to consider all options: a chance to be idealistic, rather than realistic; to think about what they want to happen, not what they think might be possible.

The conference was in two parts: *Provocations* in the morning, followed by *Plans* in the afternoon. *Provocations* comprised two sessions of four 10-minute talks, each selected on the grounds of presenting a challenge, followed by plenary discussions. Over lunch, conference participants could sign up to discuss one of these topics in more detail, or add their own topic if they felt something hadn't been covered. The afternoon of *Plans* gave each group time to outline ideas to go into this manifesto and then present them to the whole conference. In the subsequent weeks each group has written and refined its ideas, and those form the chapters of this manifesto. The authors are listed at the end of each chapter.

The impetus for organising this conference was our growing awareness of the high level of disenfranchisement felt by early career museum professionals. We were therefore pleased to hear the conference described as the first time many had felt they had a "safe environment" in which to express their views, one where they would not be judged or edited. We hope that this manifesto not only starts a debate about the ideas and views it contains, but will also lead senior museums professionals to engage more with the sector's future leaders.

Rachel Souhami  
Steve Cross

# Contents

A Diverse & Resilient Workforce	4
Rethinking Front of House	10
Public Engagement is Everyone's Responsibility	14
The Visitors' Museum	17
Open & Inclusive Culture	19
Connecting Museums	23
Collections For Now	28
The Future of Funding	33
What Can We Do Now?	39
Further Information	43



*Top: a full house for the Future of Museums conference.*

*Bottom: Rachel Souhami gets things underway.*

# A Diverse & Resilient Workforce

New talent, innovation and fresh thinking are qualities essential to the development of the museum sector. But what is the best way to train aspiring museum professionals to prepare them for a career in museums, and how do we then successfully develop and support them throughout their careers? This chapter explores new ways to train potential staff, how current professionals might be better supported in the sector, and the thorny issue of entry level jobs. Areas we have identified to be particularly problematic include:

- Lack of diversity in the museum sector, which is at present typically white, middle class and female.
- Elitism of the museum sector, which is easier to enter if one is middle-class, white, fairly wealthy and well-educated with no responsibilities such as children.
- Low pay.
- Lack of solid career paths, which decreases morale.
- Lack of financial or personnel resources for career development.
- Lack of mentoring from colleagues in the sector, which should be everyone's responsibility no matter what their job or level of seniority, and should be available to people who are not able to undertake the AMA.
- Lack of affordable training delivered by people in the sector.
- Lack of routes into the sector. If we all have to do Masters the sector will become full of mindless clones who all think in the same way. Too many people with similar beliefs and backgrounds will lead to stagnation in the museum sector. Stagnation leads to an inability to be resilient and take risks.

## Gaining entry into the sector

At present it is widely accepted that a museums studies MA is an entry-level requirement. We believe this is a myth perpetuated by universities and museums alike, one that is damaging the sector by discouraging those who cannot afford course fees and forcing many who do complete such courses into debt with little opportunity of a job.

We suggest that there should be a sector-wide discussion on the relationship between Masters degrees and employment. There are only a finite number of

museum jobs, they certainly do not increase by the number of MA graduates each year, so it is highly unlikely that everyone who takes a museum studies MA will get a job in a museum. We want to see the following changes:

- A two year Masters course that includes some theory and a range of practical experience at different types of museum (small independent, national, regional etc) in different roles (curatorial, education, display, outreach, community, front of house etc) so Masters graduates are more prepared for working in museums. At present, it is possible to graduate from a Masters and have very little first-hand museum experience on which to draw when one enters the workforce.
- Alternative ways of adapting MA courses include a fully funded compulsory placement year introduced to ensure every graduate leaves the course with a year of practical experience. Alternatively, a two-day a week internship could be provided alongside studies. A third option is that degrees could be divided into those designed to prepare people for work in the sector and those for people who want to study museum theory. To this end we believe that museum professionals should have more input into the content of Masters and that they should come from across the sector – independents/smaller museums as well as national museums; conservators, operations managers and designers, as well as educators and curators.
- There should be agreed limit on the yearly intake for those Masters courses that advertise as leading to employment in the sector. This would make acceptance onto an MA course more competitive, but would also add value to the qualification and graduates would have much more chance getting jobs. We suggest that it is far better that people compete for places before spending lots of money on a Masters than spending tens of thousands of pounds in vain.
- In addition to this conventional route, museums should sponsor further education in the form of traineeships within museums could involve the organisation paying the course fees with the expectation you go on to fulfil a work contract when you complete the course. A variation on this would be an expansion of positions in which employees work part time while completing a part-time course funded by the employer (similar to an apprenticeship). This kind of structure exists in other industries and ensures those taking qualifications have real, tangible job prospects, which make it worth it, while the industry is supporting quality education of its people.
- Discussion of museum careers should begin at an earlier age. Museums should develop relationships with schools to raise awareness of the roles



*Laura Crossley makes her case for a less elitist, better supported museum workforce.*

available and what museums do. Universities should add museums studies modules at undergraduate level.

- There should be guidelines for different role descriptions to help people thinking of joining the sector know what roles are available and what training is needed. These should be written independently.
- Finally we suggest the introduction of quota for museums interviews process to ensure a wider variety of people are interviewed.

### Training and Development within the Sector

To keep staff motivated and well-informed about new ideas it is essential to have continual training and development for current professionals. Training should be designed to ensure it is truly beneficial and also affordable. At present, although the sector undoubtedly provides an excellent variety of professional courses, these opportunities tend to be very expensive, meaning many people cannot afford to take them up. A well-trained sector is a resilient sector; staff with a range of up-to-date skills ensure continuing quality, and are well equipped to deal with issues and uncertainty. A poorly trained sector lacks morale and skills and is more likely to fail. We want to see a well-trained sector that thrives.

- Museums should take more responsibility to train their staff. They should take a more active role in developing and offering access to offering

qualifications (e.g. apprenticeships or degrees, as mentioned above) and they should offer better on the job training.

- Training for staff already in the sector is essential, the support shouldn't stop after you get over the hurdle of getting an entry-level job. Funds for training and/or free courses should be readily available.
- Mentoring needs to be more widely available at all levels. All museum professionals, whatever their level, should be expected to mentor people who are at their level/below their level to support professional development (of the mentee and mentor), provide career advice, share skills and boost confidence.
- To this end, a free mentoring scheme should be developed linking more established and new professionals. Although mentoring is currently available through the Museum Association's AMA, there is a charge for doing the qualification and some people may just want to be mentored.
- We would like to see more informal professional networks, more training events etc, and we feel museums themselves need to be more proactive in this. They should influence the formation of training opportunities for staff, not just host them.

### Job paths

True entry-level jobs are incredibly rare. We need to provide them and ensure that clear career pathways exist so that entry-level colleagues do not stagnate in roles they have outgrown. An entry-level job would be one for which an applicants would need only their education and any experience gained while in full-time education. This is not the case of most entry-level museum positions, which often require a year or more of experience actually working in the sector, which is often only achieved in a voluntary position. While there is an expectation in other sectors that new employees at the lowest level will require training to do their job, museums, seem to expect those newest to the sector to hit the ground running. Creating proper entry level posts would also mean that the lowest rung of museum employment was properly paid, rather than filled by volunteer positions, thus ensuring that those who do not have independent means would be able to enter the sector.

Some of these types of jobs may not exist at present; the sector needs to apply future-focused thinking and put in place a strategy for jobs that might be needed in the future. In order to achieve this, funding bodies should be prepared





*Panel discussion at the end of the second provocations session. Left-right: Steve Cross (chair), Dan Feeney, Fran Hegyi, Laura Crossley, Subhadra Das.*

to seed fund new roles outside of time-limited projects that will provide jobs for emerging and established museum professionals. Museums should be at the forefront of societal change; our collections may be old, but our thinking should be innovative and radical.

As well as training and supporting colleagues who started in entry level posts, we think there is also value in non-museum experience. We need to recruit from outside the sector to diversify and strengthen museums, particularly as we journey into an uncertain (financial, environmental etc) future. Similarly, as stated elsewhere in this manifesto, museum roles should be more flexible, encouraging cross-departmental working, instead of separate silos. Those with the right skills should be able to move between what may be seen as different jobs; for example, working on exhibition texts and a museum website may be seen as different careers, but actually use many of the same skills.

Finally, as future museum managers we want to ensure that museum workers are not so stretched that they are stressed and overworked, which damages wellbeing.

### Volunteers in Museums

We believe that the culture of unpaid, unappreciated roles in museums must end. Volunteers are crucial to the sustainability of museums, and must be taken

seriously. The sector must recognise that each volunteer undertakes unpaid museum work for different reasons and must strive to meet the specific needs of each volunteer; for example, some want to enter the sector, some want to give something back to the community, some want to meet new people, some want to use their skills in a new setting.

- Museum volunteering roles need to have defined outcomes.
- Different volunteer roles should be developed need to ensure the expectation that museums will follow guidelines rather than have a token volunteer/intern programme.
- Museums must refrain from labelling unpaid volunteer jobs as ‘internships’ in order to get away with asking people to do roles that should be paid for no money. Internships do not exist; either a person is employed or they are a volunteer. If someone is a volunteer, they should not be expected to work for 30 hours a week doing a high-level role; this type of work should be paid. If funding is an issue, the sector needs to start a conversation with funding bodies about how this issue can be overcome.
- The Museums Association guidelines are good in principle, but there are few pressures for museums to follow them.

Ingrid Francis

Laura Crossley

Mathilde Brault

Lyndsey Chambers

Rosie O’Connor

Vicky Pearce

Gemma Smith

Jacqueline Winston-Silk

# Rethinking Front of House

Front of House is a term that is used throughout the museums sector, yet is never clearly defined. It is used to refer to many unconnected things: to staff on the galleries, the general presentation of the museum building, the parts of the museum that are physically at the front etc.

What the museums of the future need is a tightly defined concept of what front of house is, and the opportunities and problems that can arise in relation to it. In this chapter we seek to define what is meant by front of house, what the current problems are with front of house, the immediate solutions to these problems and how front of house should be approached in the museums of the future.

## What is front of house?

Front of house is a term used most often to refer to the part of a building that is open to the public, as opposed to backstage areas. It is everywhere that the public sees.

This was a clear and understandable term to use in traditional museums until around the early 1990s, as all of the work of the museum was done within its walls. A museum was seen as a building, a repository for objects, and nothing else. Front of house staff were staff members employed to be present in the gallery spaces and communicate with the public. Front of house was almost a literal term.

Today's museum is different. Much of the work of a museum service is seen beyond the confines of its buildings. Outreach services, websites, speaking at public events, handling collections, television and social media are all examples of the work that museums are now expected to do away from their buildings. The museum now has multiple fronts to its house, and can be seen by the public in multiple ways.

The public doesn't just see people as front of house either. The public sees interpretation in galleries, marketing, publicity etc. These are all front of house. Every member of staff or volunteer that the public sees is front of house.

A good example to illustrate this is the Museum of Liverpool. The building itself was opened in 2011. They have a website ([www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)), are on Twitter ([@MuseumLiverpool](https://twitter.com/MuseumLiverpool)), have been featured on television many times,

have a channel on YouTube and run community sessions around the city. This is all work that is seen by the public away from the museum building.

In light of these many forms, we define a museum's front of house as every public face of the museum.

### The problems with front of house

There are myriad problems with front of house in today's museum. Some are widespread, and others occur in specific contexts. The central problem is the different definitions of what front of house is. All museums employ front of house staff under different titles: Museum Assistant, Visitor Service Assistant, Gallery Enabler etc. But the responsibilities of these staff are often wildly different. They can be involved in giving tours, delivering activities and education sessions, cleaning of objects or developing exhibitions. Many front of house staff do none of these tasks and are used simply for the basic purposes of security and providing basic information to visitors. Whatever role these staff members have, their presence means that other staff members in an organisation then feel that they do not have any responsibility for front of house work.

Whatever actual work front of house staff carry out, they are usually the lowest paid members of the organisation. They are also often treated dismissively in comparison with other staff members, and perceived as being at the bottom of the ladder. This is the product of a hierarchical attitude in some organisations that is exacerbated by a fixation on qualifications within the sector.

Front of house staff are often poorly trained, if they are trained at all. By this we mean training in relation to the practical responsibilities of their work (e.g. first aid, building safety, safeguarding etc) and also in other aspects of the work of museums (e.g. object handling, conservation). Some large organisations recruit their front of house staff through temp agencies, where no training is given at all. This leads to an uninformed and therefore unmotivated workforce.

This situation can lead to an 'us and them' attitude between front of house and other staff. The views of front of house staff can be ignored, and they become suspicious of other staff as a result. Ineffective staff members (front of house or otherwise) can exacerbate this problem. But if a museum service is to achieve its potential then everyone associated with it must be working together.

Away from front of house staff specifically, museums seldom have a strong public identity. Websites, site signage, uniforms, social media, gallery interpretation and other forms of communication can often have different logos, branding and language. The purpose of the museum's work can be lost through

this lack of attention to detail in basic presentation.

Even museums that do have a strong public identity and communication can make the mistake of separating that identity from the staff themselves. Front of house staff are often not acknowledged by management as the public face of the museum, and this can lead to further bad attitudes towards them and their purpose.

### Solutions to these problems

If this paints a negative picture of how our museums operate then the good news is that it can be changed, and is already being changed in organisations across the country.

The first step in finding a solution is awareness of the problems. It needs to be acknowledged that front of house staff are the eyes, ears and face of the museum. Front of house staff see the end result of everything that happens within the museum, and the public engagement with it. The vast majority of professionals working in museums enter the sector in a front of house role. This position must be seen as a breeding ground for the future leaders of the sector.

Museums must review their structure and assess how their front of house staff fit into that. There needs to be a change in attitude towards front of house staff. Their work, their ideas and their suggestions need to be valued by the organisation, as they come from the unique position of constant engagement with the public. Curators and managers need to be willing to act upon their ideas. They must also have access to effective training and career development.

As discussed throughout this manifesto ALL staff in the museum must spend time in the gallery spaces, at regular intervals. This will give a greater understanding of the museum's work and purpose, and show the end result of their work.

Every single person working in the museum must, as a minimum requirement, be passionate and competent. These are the people that the public needs to see working in their museums. If staff are not passionate and competent then they need to work somewhere else.

When the museum's workforce has addressed these problems, the museum can then work towards improving its public identity. Museums must ensure that their public face is one unified whole. The same logos, uniforms (e.g. badges etc) and branding need to be used in all aspects of front of house. This will provide clarity to the museum's identity and allow for more effective communication with the public.

Everything the museum does is for the benefit of the public. The public will see this through the museum's front of house. Museums need to ask themselves the crucial question: If our work is not for the benefit of the public then why are we doing it?

Once these changes have been implemented, the museum must maintain this improvement by communicating clearly and regularly between all sections of staff. This will build relationships and networks within the organisation.

One example of an art gallery with effective approaches to front of house is Nottingham Contemporary. All public faces of the gallery are presented in the same clear language, branding and presentation. Social media policy combines with the website clearly. All staff members wear the same name badges. Every person within the organisation is passionate and motivated. The front of house staff are central to every aspect of the organisation's work.

### Front of house in the museums of the future

So how will front of house be approached in the museums of the future? The following must be implemented:

- All public faces of the museum present a unified whole with a clear purpose. Front of house staff must be seen as centrally important to the museum's work, and as the breeding ground for future leaders in the sector.
- The public must see competent and passionate people working in their museums. This is the minimum requirement for all staff - qualifications are secondary.
- The public benefit must be explicit in all of the museum's work. If it is not for the public benefit then we don't do it.
- ALL staff must spend time in the gallery spaces at regular intervals.

Simon Brown  
Lauren Souter

# Public Engagement is Everyone's Responsibility

In recent years, engagement has been championed by the museum and heritage sector. We have increased our educational programming to move beyond the traditional audience of schools, to include teenagers, university students, adults, pre-schoolers and many more. We have redesigned the spaces within our institutions to include activities that help our visitors learn, engage and discuss. Engagement, learning, experience, enjoyment, inspiration; these are essential elements of any museum setting. And, we believe, they are the driving force and catalyst to all that we do and why we do it.

Learning is at the heart of museums. This statement is often used in mission statements, policies, development plans and funding applications within heritage and cultural venues. Yet, we have not reached a level where learning, engagement and collections are seen as equal and cohesive across the sector. This may be reflected in organisational structures, pay levels, budgets and even redundancy risks. Learning and public engagement are seen as the responsibility of only those staff who directly interact with visitors, particularly in front of house and education roles. We advocate a new perspective: public engagement is the responsibility for all those who work in museums. In the twenty first century, audiences explore our collections and museums in a multitude of ways, by talking to museum assistants, exploring collections – online or in person – attending events or through social media. As a result, whether we are the learning officer planning an educational event or the marketer checking reviews on Tripadvisor, we have a duty to provide a holistic, positive and active experience in all contexts.

This can be achieved by a number of methods.

- We want to see museum organisations take a cohesive approach to all aspects of museum work. We want to see skills sharing and/or work shadowing across departments and between individuals so we can all understand each other's roles.
- We would like to see non-delivery staff – including directors – spend a regular and consistent amount of time on galleries to better understand its operation. For front-facing staff, we would like to see more opportunities to experience museums and galleries behind the scenes. There needs to be

an ongoing reflection of what engagement is and how we define not only what we, do but why we do it and for whom. All staff should understand the different needs of their audiences and be innovative thinkers and developers in the varied ways we can interpret our collections.

- We champion the importance of consultation and participation. We want to work with everyone, as it helps us build our own identity and gives the museum a sense of place within its communities. With a creative approach, we all have a duty to expose the value of arts and culture within our venues.
- Engagement in museums must be proactive not reactive or a knee-jerk response to cultural shifts.
- There should be equal emphasis on targets for not only the quantity but also the quality of engagement that takes place.
- The distinction between formal and informal learning, events, workshops, talks, tours, interpretation and community, family and public led engagements should be removed. We want our audiences to use our venues and gain their own personal discoveries in the way that best suits them.

Let's not pigeon hole our jobs and the various titles we hold. We must be transparent about who we are as museum professionals. Let us work together to develop in each department a public facing attitude that does not see public engagement as added value, but as the central purpose for all that the museum is built around.

It is said that museums can be trusted to reflect the past yet stay current and fluid to changing times. As our audience change, how we collect, interpret, engage and interact with them will inevitably change. We are therefore part of a greater mission that encourages us to constantly evolve our museum practice. Through our curious and lateral ways of working we can continue use our collections and stories for a brighter future in museums that put audiences at the forefront of what they do.

Dee Matthews

Mhairi Gowans

Antonia Harland-Lang





*Debating ideas during the provocations sessions. Top: the panel from the first session listens to comments. Left to right: Anna Darron, Sally MacDonald, Tanisa Gunsekera, Maheema Chanrai, Dee Matthews. Bottom: questions from the floor.*

# The Visitors' Museum

In 2034, the most important things in any museum will be the visitors. The museum will still be a place to house material culture, and objects will still have a central role to play, but museums will be sites to spark off conversations. Museums will recognise that as sites of dialogue they have a responsibility to encourage, facilitate and enable evolving conversations. These could be between visitors and the museum, visitors and other visitors, visitors and the object, visitors and non-visitors, non-visitors and the museum – the important point is that dialogue is a true dialogue – not dominated by one authoritative voice.

To help achieve this, museums must feature multiple voices – possibly from within, at times coming from the visitors themselves. In these museums *everyone* is a curator, which means that to achieve the dialogue which is at their heart, the curatorial voice must rotate on a regular basis. By doing this, no one voice emerges as dominant, and thus the central tenet of dialogue is promoted – differences of opinion are valid, and can even be promoted through changes in curatorial/interpretation/display approach towards the same object or theme.

To further support this rotation of voices, regular rotation of collections is required too. This allows the museum and visitors to exist in a space where their position is constantly being rethought, evolving, and expanding knowledge. Visitors have a huge amount to offer museums, through knowledge accumulation, opinions, positions of thought and interaction. By rotating the collection this process retains a semi-permanent state of activity, ideally promoting repeat visits – and more importantly repeat interactions, whether physically or when away from the physical space of the museum.

To promote these interactions, museums must make increased efforts to understand their audience. Intelligent visitor research will underpin the direction of each museum, with the voice of the visitor being heard at all stages and throughout all aspects of an institution's work. Local communities must be included in agenda-setting for museums, with emphasis being placed on repositioning the visitor from the bottom-up consumer, to a top-down influencer. One initial means of achieving this will be the inclusion of visitor representation as Trustees, thus locating visitors at the heart of the decision making process. To push this notion further, we ask if museums should be seeing every visitor as a Trustee?

Visitors know what they want to see and so must be included in the process of

managing their own experiences. However, museums should also recognise the importance of unexpected interactions – at times the museum ‘specialists’ must have the opportunity to inspire and provoke visitors – thus further stimulating dialogue. Though this comes with the caveat that all interactions with the museum are valid. Is there such a thing as the wrong answer? No reaction to an object/display/event/dialogue is still a reaction, and must be recognised as such. If a display garners no noticeable reaction from visitors then this must be read alongside other more tangible examples of dialogue.

On the subject of ‘specialists’ our visitor-led museums should recognise that specialist roles are not the preserve of curatorial departments. In particular, visitor services staff have the ability to negotiate the relationship between the visitor and museum, museum and object, visitor and object, visitor and visitor in a way that a back of house professional could not - the expertise they bring and results which they achieve must be recognised. In addition, museums must recognise the importance of collaborative relationships with other conventional sources of knowledge, particularly universities and research facilities. By utilising the skills and knowledge of these outside influencers, the museum will not only be creating a fantastically efficient toolbox to support dialogue, it will also be forming stronger relationships with its visitors.

Ultimately, the term ‘visitor’ is a catch-all generalisation, which includes everyone from the subject specialist through to the toddler experiencing their first encounter with the museum. There are subject experts within the visitor base; by bringing these experts into a closer dialogue with the museum, a stronger accumulated knowledge can be achieved, and thus shared.

Dan Feeney  
Lizzy Baddeley  
Mary Ealden  
Emma Long  
Lyndsey Marshall  
Adrian Murphy  
Mark Small  
Miki Webb

# Open & Inclusive Culture

In the current climate, museums fail to face up to the controversial issues which they should be embracing and publicising. Exhibitions and exhibits shy away from confronting political issues surrounding items and cultures, and deal with difficulties behind closed doors rather than openly presenting them to the public. For 2034 we hope there to be a transparent museum culture where the intricacies of the museum sector are open to, accessible to and interactive with everyone. Our vision for the museum of 2034 is a museum that:

## Recognises and shows that museum objects can have multiple interpretations.

The people who made, owned, used, studied, collected and viewed an object may all have something different to say about it. Our museum of the future will not shy away from these different personal stories but rather embrace and publicise them.

## Anticipates conflict and accommodates conflicting voices

An awareness of (potential) conflict is essential when dealing with the presentation of an object or indeed a whole exhibit. Objects, their stories and their histories often inspire multiple interpretations, opinions and divisions, be they social, cultural, political, religious, etc. It is necessary for a museum, and those working within it, to understand, acknowledge and accommodate these conflicts so as to best present ideas, stories and histories, whether from a small community or an entire country or continent. These interpretations and displays should be both as neutral as possible, with no particular opinion favoured, whilst also identifying and outlining relevant conflicts. Past tendencies to illustrate Western imperialist versions of history should, by 2034, have been eradicated. Museums need to make more of an effort to move away from these archaic practices and take pains to illustrate and describe history from a factual point of view. Moreover, the stories of colonised, provincial and conquered people need to be much more present. Moves in the Americas to regain knowledge about and build museums around the indigenous American Indians is an example of a move in this direction.

## Values objects as vessels for multiple stories

Museums are first and foremost educational institutions and to suppress, conceal, diminish or detract from a particular aspect of a history, story



Maheema Chanrai and Tanisa Gunesekera give their provocation at the Future of Museums conference.

or conflict is to deceive the public and future generations. All stories and voices contribute to the history and ideas behind an object or exhibit. The incorporation of as much information as possible (without being overwhelming!) can only add further value to museums overall.

### Includes (and contextualises) non-museum voices at every level

Non-museum voices bring feelings, interpretations and understandings of objects and histories, of which a museum or other institution cannot always have knowledge. Utilising the interpretations, opinions and stories of individuals with whom an object, exhibit, etc has intimate resonance adds further value to the offering a museum can present to the wider public. Museums of the future need to do more to bring local and relevant community stories and presences into the museum, relevant exhibitions and the information museums offer through community outreach and public engagement. Regional, ethnic, and religious groups, amongst others, should be invited to comment and contribute on relevant topics should they wish. In addition to learned curators and scholars giving academic talks, local public speakers and debates should be encouraged to speak and present on their own backgrounds and interests.

The Natural History Museum's *Extinction: Not the End of the World?* exhibition, for example, gave people the opportunity to comment about their reactions to

extinction and the natural world by offering leaf-shaped paper and pencils at the end of the exhibit. Visitors were invited to share their thoughts, opinions and concerns through words or drawings and to add their “leaves” to an enclosure with seats which created an intimate and open area enabling everyone to read one another’s comments. This inclusion of visitors’ comments within a museum’s exhibitions is something we want to see more of in the future.

### Embeds engagement practice in every day work and ethos

The incorporation of local skills, opinions, stories and ideas into the everyday work of a museum will encourage interaction, participation and learning. Displays and exhibits should invite local and relevant groups to offer interpretive art, historic objects, etc to add to the museum experience. Local talents and goods should be utilised to help elucidate meaning for others to whom the material does not otherwise resonate.

The Museum of London’s efforts to incorporate young people in its Islamic Fashion collection demonstrates this progression towards involving the community in museum projects. The knowledge and experiences of locals and relevant groups helped inform the exhibit, made it more accessible and enabled more voices to contribute to the project. Utilising these groups, their skills and their personal attachment to the material involved allowed the exhibit to be understood and relate to all sorts of visitors on a personal level. Rather than simply being a passive narrative of changes in dress in London during the twentieth century, the exhibit increased in relevance to visitors.

### Continues/sustains on-going relationships

Mutual exchange, cooperation and respect should underlie all museum relationships be it with other museums, institutions, communities or individuals. The current lack of, or minimal, interaction between the public and museums is the result of traditional museum practices failing to adapt and change with the times. Moves towards community engagement and involvements are appearing but need to go further. Relationships built up between museums, locals and target communities – as can be seen in the above Museum of London example – need to be strengthened and sustained by 2034. These mutually beneficial relations will inspire and inform projects of the future. Exhibitions of existing museums such as the Black Cultural Archive and new museums such as the Migration Museum project are built solely on such relationships. Strong relations between museums and the public will ultimately make for more well-rounded and better informed exhibits and information.

## Is willing to communicate and adapt

Museums communicate ideas, stories, histories and opinions. Suppression of any part of this will cause a museum to fail itself and others. Museum staff must be willing to incorporate the opinions and stories of non-museum voices and be willing to learn from and grow as necessary. Museums need to communicate with the public but also with one another. Instead of current attitudes where battles for funding dominate museum-museum relations, these institutions need to embrace and advertise one another. Larger museums covering a particular topic within a single exhibit need to publicise a smaller more specialist museum and encourage visitors to broaden their horizons, travel to new places and become more informed about their interests.

In addition, museums of 2034 should encourage the public to think of themselves as more than just passive visitors. Museums should become hubs of debate and new ideas – they cannot assume and maintain stagnant opinions decided by directors or management from times gone by. Museums of 2034 must embrace changing political and social views and encourage the public, their staff and countries, alike to consider new perspectives and interpretations.

Naomi Haymon-Gorlov

Maheema Chanrai

Tanisa Gunsekera

Eleanor Black

Siân Hunter Dodsworth

Catherine Jones

Halima Khanom

Emily Miller

# Connecting Museums

- We would like to see a dramatic change to the ways in which museums engage with one another in public in the future.
- We desire a museum industry that champions a united front to enable all visitors, and potential visitors, to see the rich experiences that can be had in museums across the sector and allow them the opportunity to pursue their interests in a particular subject across institutions.
- Our museums of the future actively support one another, and work publically towards a common goal of helping the public to engage with, question, and understand the world around them.

Currently, the museum sector has two sides: one collaborative and inward facing, one competitive and public facing. As museum professionals, we are acutely aware that much of what is achieved by both large and small museums is thanks to resource and knowledge sharing across the sector. Unfortunately, the great majority of our collaborative work is not visible to the public.

Despite a common interest in preserving and interpreting a shared cultural heritage, institutions are obliged to compete for funding, attention, and visitor numbers. This competitive environment unfortunately leads to a perceived hierarchy of institutions, and implies to the public that bigger and better funded is better.

Creating even the perception of such a hierarchy can devalue smaller institutions, which is unfortunate as these museums often have equally fascinating collections and can tell certain stories more effectively than their larger counterparts. Unable to compete with larger and well funded museums individually for public attention, smaller institutions often group together by subject area in an effort to pool their resources to attract more visitors (for example Small Historic Houses or London Museums of Health and Medicine). This categorises museums and their collections in a way that, we argue, can make it difficult for visitors to understand how objects might be interpreted from multiple perspectives and be part of multiple histories. We believe it undermines both the experience for visitors and our sector's ability to help people understand and appreciate our collections and shared history. No one museum can ever tell a complete story because all objects can be interpreted from a multitude of angles and used to tell many different narratives.



The following example illustrates how one could easily connect a series of institutions of varying sizes and subject areas through a currently untold narrative of John Hunter and anatomists of the eighteenth century:

- Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons: comparative anatomy collected by 18th century surgeon John Hunter.
- Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow: collection of John's brother, William.
- Benjamin Franklin House Museum: home to both William Hewson, anatomist and William's colleague, and Benjamin Franklin – friend of John, who installed his invention, the lightning rod, on John's home.
- English Heritage's site of Tyburn gallows at Marble Arch, where John Hunter's human specimens were collected.
- British Museum, which in 1834 was given Hunter's giraffe specimen, the first giraffe seen by Londoners in the eighteenth century.
- Royal Veterinary College: Hunter felt it was important to understand how to effectively treat animals as well as humans, and helped to found the college.
- Grant Museum, UCL: like Hunter's museum, an eighteenth century collection of comparative anatomy specimens.
- Haydn House, Vienna, Austria: John Hunter tended to be an aloof character, but his wife was a well known socialite. She composed the English lyrics to several of famed composer Joseph Haydn's songs.
- Natural History Museum, which was given John Hunter's famous whale specimen in 1930.
- Imperial War Museum: after John Hunter's museum was bombed in 1942, the building's ruins were used as 'Pig Clubs' or urban pig farms. Photos of such clubs are available from Imperial War Museum.

There are of course many other institutions whose collections could be further linked to the story of John Hunter and anatomists of the eighteenth century, and these are only a sample of the countless histories that intertwine collections and institutions. The trouble is that while those of us who work within museums often spend a great deal of time with collections are able to make and recognise these fascinating links, this is not true for most of the public.

### How visitors stand to benefit from a collaborative museum sector

Museums should be actively assisting visitors to make these connections, to enable them to easily follow threads and narratives that inspire their curiosity. By encouraging visitors to go to more places, we can help them more easily recognise the connections between collections, objects, historic sites. In this

way we as a sector can help more people understand that their heritage is not a series of disjointed events and places dotted around a landscape, but that science, history, literature, and art are all connected and directly impact one another.

Some fantastic examples of institutions making such overt links to one another do exist. For example, the First Time Out collaboration between the Wellcome Collection, Kew Gardens, Horniman Museum, Natural History Museum, and Science Museum; or the Georgians Revealed exhibition at the British Library which memorably recommended follow up visits to many of the London based institutions relevant to the exhibition. We believe such projects should be more widely encouraged and better funded.

### What would museums stand to gain from such collaborations?

We believe that better collaborations will ultimately benefit our sector in the long term by allowing it to be more a more widely appreciated aspect of British society. Encouraging visitors to pursue their interests and continue their cultural journey by actively making links and recommendations to other museums could help increase museums' reach and visitor numbers across the sector as people discover new interests and new places. In addition, we believe smaller museums would benefit from an expansion of cross-regional collaborations (such as those at Two Temple Place), which enable wider exposure of collections.

### Our vision

A strong united front is needed to demonstrate that we do, and are proud to, work together and rely on one another to enhance both our own institutions and the public's experience. Creating a culture of active collaboration and celebrating these connections would allow our sector to stop navel-gazing and focus on what should be a common goal: helping visitors question and better understand the world around them. We envision a future where

- inter-museum connections are explicitly and critically discussed.
- active and public collaboration, mutual support, and knowledge sharing is the norm.
- all museums and all staff members actively work not only to advance their own institutions, but the museum sector as a whole.
- our sector celebrates the fact that all collections have historical and topical links to those of other institutions. We want our sector to make these links clear, and encourage rather than hinder the public to follow their interests across different sites.

United, our sector can achieve greater things, and influence and inspire so many more people than any one institution can alone.

### How could we achieve this?

As we've mentioned above, there are some great partnerships already at work. But why stop there? We believe the models must be increased and enhanced, and offer the following suggestions as a starting point:

- An easily achievable goal is for museums across the UK to sign up to an 'Open House London' style scheme. While maintaining their individual branding, museums could opt into a national (and perhaps one day, international) directory of museums. Their information could be listed on an easy to use, 'one stop shop' website which would allow visitors to explore their interests by topic/time period/location etc. This would effectively allow maintain institutions to operate independently of one another, while also being committed to a national/international cross promotional programme that benefits both participants and visitors by providing easy access to information about the sector as a whole to a wider audience.
- Like 'Open House London' or many European nations' 'National Museum Days', all members of this scheme could visibly celebrate their collaboration with a prominent, government backed day/weekend/week. This could include media campaigns promoting the sector as a whole, and free openings to all museums and exhibitions to allow for greater exposure.
- Behind the scenes, we would like to see envision a future with a country-wide collections online database, which recognises the multiple perspectives from which any object can be viewed. We believe a dedicated website examining the multifaceted stories of objects will stimulate and facilitate a simpler and exceptional loans programme.

Anna Darron  
Muriel Bailly  
Sarah Bond  
Rosie Dalgado  
Terri Dendy  
Otone Doi  
Alkisti Efthymiou  
Jack Shoulder



*Top: the manifesto drafting session.*

*Bottom: presenting ideas developed while drafting the chapters.*

# Collections For Now

This chapter came out of discussions following a provocation that proposed curatorial staff should be given the freedom to burn their collections. We concluded that this would not be a good idea, but our discussions did expose a frustration with the stifling culture of procedure in collections management and a sector which cannot take risks. Our frustrations also stemmed from our collections; there's just too much in them, too much bureaucracy associated with them, and too many of them are still hidden away. In an ideal world, it would be easier to get rid of more of what is in our stores one way or another.

Our current codes of ethics, best practice and cultural laws are both a response to past cultural vandalism and an acknowledgement that none of us is infallible. We need base rules to guide us. These are also intended to safeguard the reputation of museums as institutions which are trusted by the public,<sup>1</sup> a trust which could be undermined by too cavalier an approach to collections management. However, this collective set of ethical guidelines, laws and ideas of best practice have almost always tended to the risk-averse. It is perhaps time that museums are bolder about rationalising their collections and vocalising what they think should be kept and what should be disposed.

In an ideal world, it would be easier to get rid of more of what is in our stores, one way or another. In this chapter we set out some of the changes we would like to see. However, we cannot hope to tackle the entire field of collections acquisition and management and instead we propose nine guiding principles, which are summarised at the end.

## Funding & identity

- Keep to the mission of your museum.
- Funding bodies should cut red tape and embrace diversity.

We do not think that the current frameworks governing collections and their care are necessarily bad; on the contrary, they have undoubtedly helped the condition and state of our collections. What we believe is that museums and their staff should be encouraged to march to the beat of their own drum. Although museums and their staff have a lot of independence in how they use their collections, the projects through which we operate are rarely financed from a museum's core funding but instead from grant and funding bodies. The problem of having a multitude of funding bodies, however, is that the museum's own voice is often at risk of being diluted by being wedged into other institution's



*Subhadra Das gets provocative about collections at the Future of Museums conference.*

agendas. Every group that holds the purse-strings has an agenda to pursue; museums should realise there is no shame in being political in how we also use objects. In the future, at least in the case of lottery and government funding, grants bodies need to be more responsive to local needs and the nuances between the missions of different museums, and work to promote innovative projects that make sense for each individual institution. Some museums are intended to hold a historical material record and nothing more, while others are focused on learning and engagement, while others are research collections; whatever a museum's mission, it should play to its strengths, and funders should embrace the diversity of our national collections. The Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, is already working in this direction by making its funding decisions on the regional level.

### Acquisition, disposal & loans

- Do not collect objects without a use in mind.
- We collect stories, not objects.
- Museums should be more fluid in presenting objects.
- No donations with qualifications.

Keeping objects because of a chance they will be needed for an unforeseen use in the future denies our own curatorial agency in the present. We make a value judgement whenever we choose or do not choose an object to collect or dispose. Nothing should be collected without a specific purpose or use in mind within exhibitions, public programs, research, learning etc. In fact, this is not very controversial, as most museums only acquire objects with a purpose in mind for them within their institution. However, we believe that all museums should have a rigorous acquisitions policy that will prevent objects entering the collections if they have no use within the museum.

Collecting is unseen by the visitor, we can give them more insight into the process and invite them into it through interpreted open storage and more public consultation. At their core, museums are about engaging curiosity, and we need to work harder to make people curious about our objects through how both we and they can use them.

We should not allow donors to set limitations on how we can use their objects. When objects come into a museum they also come into the public domain, and should be free to be used and enjoyed by all. The contexts in which museums and collections are situated and operate change constantly, and conditional loans can rapidly become a hindrance. The Burrell Collection, for instance, is an example of a collection whose original bequest has been rendered irrelevant through improvements in conservation and secure transportation.<sup>2</sup>

We believe museums should be bolder in how they rationalise their collections according to their own mission. De-accessioning no longer a taboo subject, and it is something that should be encouraged.<sup>3</sup> So long as the process is honest, transparent and open to nuance, it can liberate museums from irrelevant objects. Disposed objects should continue to be offered to other museums and galleries first, but if the end-result is sale or destruction then this is not a bad thing.

Ideally, however, we should be more open to sharing collections and objects across museums rather than fencing ourselves into our own chosen corners or disciplines. Every museum is telling just one part of a wider story, and together we can tell the whole story better in concert. Loaning objects is too often a lengthy, risk-averse process that is not worth the time or the effort, and an improved, standardised loan system is something we should be striving for. It would allow far more touring exhibitions from larger museums to smaller ones, and from national museums to regional museums (and vice versa). It could also be an alternative to the never-ending task of acquiring 'representative' collections.

## Collections management

Collections management is necessarily bureaucratic. It is a world of documents and records, and where objects are put into systems from which they are very difficult to dislodge. An accessioned object is granted protected status, which means it is often incredibly difficult to dispose of objects with no discernible use. But the fact is that many museums are running out of space and continue to keep objects which may not have been looked at or used in decades. Museum staff are constantly making value judgements according to the best data available, and need to better acknowledge the active role they play in this process.

## Conservation

- No object lasts forever.

The preservation of objects is not the be-all and end-all of museum collections. It is, of course, a good thing that we have agreed best practice and standards for conservation and collections management, but keeping every object kept to the same high standard required by ICOM<sup>4</sup> or Accreditation<sup>5</sup> is a pipe-dream for many museums due to time and financial constraints. Digitisation, cataloguing and conservation are like cleaning out the Augean Stables.

## Ethics

- Keep one eye on society.
- We do not need to be beholden to past values if they become outdated.

We did not have as much time as we would like to have discussed the ethics of collections management. It is a fraught topic, and one which is prone to subjective opinion. The tension between allowing museums to use objects as they wish versus respecting source communities and maintaining the relationship of trust with the public is one which we could not hope to solve in our session. Of course we should promote and encourage a humanistic, equal and open society, but at the same time museums need to explore human life, history and future in as whole and unflinching a way as possible. We should not shy away from collecting objects which tell difficult stories.

## Conclusion

Museums preserve the past for the future and one of their roles is to hold objects considered to be important for human culture and memory. We feel we should be bolder about how we use our objects, and appreciate that some objects cannot – indeed, need not – last forever. We could be far keener in using objects in artistic interventions, in handling collections, or simply inviting other



groups to use the objects in ways that creates new memories and stories for museums and collections.

We have not discussed what type of objects should be collected, but it is not our place to do so. The ideal is that every object has a purpose other than sitting on the shelf in a museum, but we cannot deny that museums also have to hold objects as an historical record, which may mean they cannot be brought out of storage for reasons of fragility. The ideal would be that museum stores are made as accessible as possible, with loan agreements easier, the public, specialists, artists, students and whoever wants to explore, research, learn from and exhibit our collections.

Adam Koszary

Subhadra Das

Emma Reeve

Jack Gelsthorpe

Christopher Whitby

#### End notes

1. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/news/03042013-public-attitudes-research-published>
2. <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10879>
3. <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=11113>
4. [http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=121](http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&id=121)
5. [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/accreditation\\_standard\\_english\\_web.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/accreditation_standard_english_web.pdf)

# The Future of Funding

There is little doubt that the ways in which museums and heritage organisations will gain, seek, and use funding will change significantly by 2034. We suspect that the recent decline in public funding for culture will not be reversed, that other sources of funding must be actively sought, and that the current approach to funding is not sustainable. As emerging museum professionals this is worrying. It makes us fearful and wary of our future in the sector. However, fear is no bad thing: it can motivate innovation, dispel mediocrity and force daring. Thus we emerging museum professionals will feel the fear and fund it anyway.

In this chapter we set out ideas for how museums in 2034 should aim to function in order to survive, with specific regard to funding. We believe these ideas will also enable our sector to continue to be relevant, responsive, switched on and respected.

## We will work to maintain free museums in 2034

We believe that museums should maintain an element of free access. We think that free access to culture is essential and socio-economic status should not hinder access or enjoyment. Therefore the ideas outlined in this document are laid out with the view of cultivating future funding strategies that will continue to allow free access to certain core services i.e. free, daytime admission to permanent collections and collections of national and international importance. There will of course also continue to be a mix of paid for and free exhibitions, events and other activities which will complement and support this.

## We will rethink the distribution of public funding

We believe that any public funding which is currently allocated for core services and other projects, such as grant-in-aid and ACE partnership funding, should provide a baseline for core, statutory services and access including essential capital maintenance. However, we propose that the distribution of these funds be managed slightly differently to the present, subject to a review. The review should identify the current total portion of public money available for museums and heritage organisations across all jurisdictions (direct funding, via ACE etc). This money should then be re-distributed to venues across the country (as is the model now) but with more consideration given to area specific population density, the nature of collections at each venue and the region with regard to which venues actually may need more financial help to function on a daily basis.



*Discussing the future of finance during the manifesto drafting session.*

For example, we would recognise that certain flagships collections or venues in London, given their location and the global importance of their collections, actually have a better chance of being able to, and continuing to be able to, seek and generate private funds/income. They have a higher potential to develop sustainable self-sufficiency and thus during the review should be awarded less core funding than other venues. Collections and venues in other regions where population density and the cultural landscape of the region means that self-sufficiency is more of a challenge would get more core funding support. In this instance core funding is defined as covering the basic costs of running the institution, such as the salaries of those who offer core services and overheads. Not all salaries currently funded could be defined as delivering core services and the review would need to identify which activities should be defined as core. We recognise that some areas of work may need some money from the core funding pot as a jumping off point to generate a self-sufficient programme of work. This would have to applied for with a careful project plan and reviewed on a 5 year basis.

Given this baseline of public money granted to maintain basic day-to-day function, it should be up to the individual museum to seek and cultivate support, partnerships and ways of working to deliver further activities that may widen their scope in terms of re-interpretation of, and creative programming and production around, their content for their desired audiences. We would insist that certain flagships collections and venues in London would only be eligible to apply for further public funding for this kind of activity if it was in partnership with smaller venues.

We understand that there is a wide range of museum and heritage venues that are funded in different ways – this ‘core services’ model would therefore only apply to those who currently receive public funding. Independent museums, charities, university museums and any privately owned venues would not be included in this.

### Public funding and project grants

The museums sector needs to develop a more sophisticated approach to how we spend other pots of public money and money provided through grants from charitable and other organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Art Fund. We need to develop more open and realistic conversations with funders where we can all assess the current and long-term value of projects in detail. Sometimes the fact that an institution is awarded funds is given more value by its staff than the actual project outcomes. It can often seem that the race simply to be awarded the money overshadows the thought behind how the money will be used effectively in practice, and consequently projects can conclude unfinished or end up producing significantly different outcomes than planned or anticipated. This is possibly because the current funding structure means that museums are often reacting to changing governmental agendas, and thus projects that seem relevant in one year lose their currency five years on. This sometimes makes it difficult to manage funded projects effectively.

We should also invest more in developing a workforce that is skilled in project development and management. This means training staff in how to seek funding, and how to develop well thought-out, timed and resourced project plans which use the money awarded to the best of its potential. This should include thinking about how this project will look in five years’ time and how it will contribute to the future of the museum’s function.

### Museums need to reconsider their attitude to commercial practice.

If we are to accept that by 2034 public money will, at best, only be available to provide baseline core services, museums and heritage sites will need to start acting more like businesses. In order to maintain and cultivate the free access to culture that we believe is necessary, we will have look to start being more self-sufficient. This will mean we will need to implement a complete culture shift. We will need to be more business-like, not just with regard to operations but also, and crucially, with regard to attitude. We will need to be bolder and more assertive in the way we articulate the value of culture to those from whom we are seeking support and not shy away from or conceal the fact that we will need to make money in order to thrive. To achieve these outcomes we must:

### Implement ethical and intelligent commercialisation

The road to self-sufficiency will be a rocky one. The majority of museums and heritage organisations often operate to cover costs only and are thus not adept at acting in a commercial capacity. We need to understand that to adopt a more commercial outlook we will need to develop our own practices and not attempt simply to graft current successful models for commerciality from examples in the tourist industry onto our organisations. We need create our own ethical and intelligent commercialisation, which means that we are self-sufficient but also deliver authentic content to a high standard, maintaining our academic integrity and also contributing meaningfully to the cultural landscape of the country. We house authentic and often socially & historically sensitive material; we do not want to create content that replicates, for example, the outputs of commercial tourism companies.

### Be transparent at all levels

We will need to be bolder at articulating the reality of funding for culture within the public domain in order to secure adequate support. We should also be better at engaging the public with the realities of the decline of public funding and how this affects their relationship with the museum and heritage sector. We need be transparent when we start to charge more and assert that keeping the heritage and arts afloat is a public effort. Indeed, as the support of public money erodes we should be less apologetic about charging for audiences' access to history. We need to generate debates, comment and conversations in the media on why this is, push these messages through our professional networks and be ready to combat even more scrutiny of our activities in the public realm as a result of this.

We will need museum professionals, at all levels of each organisation, to be better informed about how their own activities, departments & organisations, and the kaleidoscope of museum, galleries and other heritage venues within the sector, are funded. Museum human resources departments should allocate time to train all staff on the financial reality of how their venues function financially so that all staff can be well-informed representatives for the sector as a whole. This should also contribute more collective financial acuity at all levels of the organisation.

### Have a bolder approach to content interpretation

We need to be bolder when it comes to interpreting our content. We house the past and thus have the tools for understanding the future. We should be a relevant and influential voice in the public domain. We should get involved in

thorny debates, be a meaningful and reliable voice in our communities, from a high level, right down to small local levels. This would help our audiences realise that we are worth investing in.

### Become better at collaborating

All venues across the sector will need to work more closely. If funding does become tighter we will need to draw together to demonstrate the strength of the museum sector. As we all become more commercial the risk of pitting ourselves against each other becomes more and more of an issue. We should not allow this to happen. Ideas for how this may work have been discussed in an earlier chapter, and could also include cross promotion, for example, working in partnership to sell joint exhibition ticket offers, or seasons of exhibitions which share a common. We also suggest a national curatorial service where curators, experts and other professionals work across a number of different venues sharing expertise and not keeping it to ourselves.

We will also need to get better at working across art forms, with theatres, arts centres and all other creative organisations and groups. External creative partnerships and collaborations can help us reinterpret our content. We should invest in creative and artistic interpretation of our collections and content demonstrating that we are switched on cultural venues who work with other arts professionals; for example, commissioning exhibitions and installations, live work with theatres, art collectives, digital designers etc. We could extend this to partnering with other venues on school visits. Could a school visit a museum in the morning and then go to a show at the theatre as one joined up visit on a certain theme?

### Have an international outlook

We need to widen our nets to include global markets. There are international organisations and agencies that will pay for access to our expertise, and this is the case not just for the national museums. We should widen our content to international audiences and not be afraid to charge for this. We should develop more sophisticated skills-sharing relationships with international museums and heritage organisations not just on a national level, but also locally creating international museum partnerships. For example, the British Museum has partnered with the Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi, charging for consultancy and expertise on setting up a national museum; could this model be developed? We need to gain a more intimate understanding of how museums and heritage venues function in different parts of the globe and identify areas where we can realistically seek support or generate income.

## Reward our staff

If we are aiming to achieve more self-sufficiency and ask our staff to be more active in the financial health of their museum and the sector as above we need to start to incentivise this in a more business-like way. With less public money and more of our own money we can potentially exercise more autonomy over how we treat, contract and pay staff. For example we could re-work the John Lewis staffing model for museums where salaries are more responsive and tailored to performance in certain areas. In addition, we could define maximum salary multiples between the top and bottom jobs in the organisation to avoid higher management being very highly paid and junior staff suffering poor salaries.

We may need to get even more hard-nosed though. We may need to implement performance-related pay for certain areas of work in the sector. If we can incentivise commercial achievements in certain areas we may be able to attract more talent and expertise into the sector and diversify our staff base. This couldn't be applied to all areas of museum work, but it might be appropriate for some jobs in the hopes that if it works to achieve self-sufficiency in the future, we can improve salaries for all areas of work across the board.

However, we also need to get much better at understanding that we can value our staff not just through monetary rewards. We should look to commercial and private companies' models for staff benefits. We should provide better training and other benefits for museum professionals in their roles including professional development, well-being and personal development. However, this training needs to be cutting edge and fit for purpose so it needs to be invested in meaningfully. Therefore we suggest we look away from many current courses, which tend to be stuck in the 1990s.

Jenny Bull

Georgeenia Ariaratnam

Rosie Clarke

Pippa Hough

David Juler

Angie Kim

# What Can We Do Now?

While most of the chapters of this manifesto focus their ideas twenty years into the future, thinking big about how museums could change for the better, this chapter treats the long-term as a series of short term challenges, asking what we can do right now to address some of the issues we face entering and working within the museums sector.

## THE PROBLEMS

### Developing skills and insight

- Individuals often require more experience and skills in order to break into and progress in museum jobs. However, there are very few places where information, skills and knowledge are informally shared, both within institutions and between them. Training is available, but this can be ad hoc and piecemeal and is often too expensive to access. There is also the issue of taking time away from work in order to attend such courses.
- We need more mentoring, and a more obvious way to find a mentor who will help us.
- We want to know more about visitor research and similar areas of museum work, but all the interesting reading is behind pay walls.

### Networking & peer support

- There is a lack of networks for mutual help and collaboration, and while some people have excellent contact and networks through parental or professional connections, many others don't.
- Meeting up can be difficult to organise and expensive: some employers won't make time available to network and build museum contacts, so this is pushed into evenings or weekends.

### Jobs: applications & progression

- There is a lack of transparency about how museum staff make decisions on who to shortlist, interview and hire. Museum jobs are so oversubscribed there is an acceptance that there will only be minimal, if any, feedback on applications. Ideally, there would be access to experienced recruiters for help shaping job applications and advice on interview technique.
- Information about career progression is not always visible or easily



accessible. Often information, ideas, networks and conferences are discovered by accident rather than by design.

- Many people who want to work in museums get jobs as visitor service assistants but this is a post one can get 'stuck' in.
- Many volunteer posts are beneficial for the museum, but it can sometimes feel like volunteers are expected to give time for free but do not receive training or the experience that will help their career progression.

## SOME THINGS THAT WE HAVE SEEN AND LIKED

- There is good practice in some museums that helps new staff to progress. The Science Museum's Contemporary Science team offer medium-term (month-long) research-based volunteering opportunities, and staff with that experience have gone on into full-time exhibit research jobs at the museum.
- There is sometimes sharing between museums in terms of visiting each other's exhibitions for free too, but this is too often a one-off and doesn't involve enough interaction with the people who put the exhibitions together.
- There are places that focus a lot on developing their Visitor Service Assistants, such as Wellcome Collection who let them develop their own tours and often second them onto exhibition and event projects, but this is rare.
- There are some opportunities to network that are affordable. We all commented that £10 for a day of networking (this meeting) was more realistic to us than a £150+ conference.

## SOLUTIONS

### Developing skills and insight

- We think organisations could usefully offer work shadowing to emerging professionals. Being able to shadow staff in other parts of our museum, or in roles in other institutions, would really help us to understand the skills we need to develop to progress. Even one day would make a big difference.
- Museum managers should join forces and instigate 'insight days' where teams visit each other to learn about each other's work.
- We would like more research (especially visitor research) and relevant articles made easily accessible and free.

### Networking & peer support

- We'd like a wider variety of opportunities to meet and share with one another, including evening events. Sometimes we just want to socialise, as

well as having a more diverse set of real-world and online forums for meeting and sharing. We encourage museums staff to set up their own events and forums, and we'd like to see managers helping us to invest time in things like Museums Showoff, Museomix, Drinking About Museums and the other unofficial networks that have sprung up in the last few years, as well as start our own. This might include advertising them in staff rooms, arranging rotas to allow staff to attend or making museum spaces available for events without charge.

- We'd like to see cross-industry funders putting money into supporting networking events set up by museum professionals, in the same way that the subject specialist networks encourage sharing by curatorial staff (traditionally funded by ACE).

### Jobs: applications & progression

- A mentor-mentee matching service should be established on a regional or even national level. Even staff with only a little more experience, who have made one more career step, could be good mentors.
- Museums should develop clear pathways for visitor services staff who would like to go on to other roles in the museum sector. These staff should be offered as much time in 'office' environments as possible.
- Museums should consider volunteers as internal candidates when jobs are available, with volunteering time counted as equivalent to employment.
- Museums should make sure that they offer career-focused volunteering opportunities, for example in content or documentation roles.
- Museum Studies MA courses need to include more work within and with museums. MA students are ideal event organisers, for example, and many would welcome the opportunity to work on projects like this outside of their courses.
- We'd like someone to collect together all the information about MA scholarships in one place. Too often we find out by accident or there is limited information.

### THINGS WE CAN DO STRAIGHT AWAY

- All office- and lab-based museum staff should go and make friends with at least one frontline member of staff who deals with customers right now.
- We've built a network on Facebook to share contacts and ideas. It's like an Old School Tie network, but not old, not based on a school and with no tie. It's a safe space with people we trust in it to help each other.
- We will set up a forum where early career staff can learn how hirers make

decisions, and make a recording of this forum publicly available. It will also explore career trajectories at all levels in museums.

- We will support each other's job applications by setting up online CV and application support groups.
- Those of us with experience will start mentoring (if we aren't already doing so).

Steve Cross

Luke Beahan

Lizzy Simpson

Catherine Townsend

Harriet Ward

# Further Information

## About the Organisers

The Future of Museums conference was organised by Rachel Souhami and Steve Cross and hosted by the UCL Department of Public and Cultural Engagement, whose Lizzy Baddeley gave oodles of help.

Dr Rachel Souhami is a museums academic and consultant in the fields of exhibition production, organisational culture and working practices. She has worked in the museums sector for over 15 years. Rachel is producer of Museums Showoff. She lectures in museum studies and visual culture at Imperial College London.

Dr Steve Cross is head of public engagement at UCL and a consultant to the communication, engagement and cultural industries. He was co-curator of Medicine Man and Medicine Now at Wellcome Collection, and founded Bright Club, Science Showoff and Museums Showoff. He is a trustee of At-Bristol.

A copy of the conference programme can be seen on the next page.

## Photographs

All photographs were taken by Lizzy Baddeley. If you would like to reproduce any of them, please contact us at the email address below.

## Contact

For further information about the conference, please email us at [conference@museumsshowoff.org](mailto:conference@museumsshowoff.org)

For further information about Museums Showoff, please visit our website:

<http://museumsshowoff.org>

or Twitter feed: <https://twitter.com/museumsshowoff>

# The Future of Museums

Thursday 3 April 2014

## Final programme

9.00am Registration

9.30am Welcome

9.45am **Keynote 1**

- Sally MacDonald (director, UCL Museums & Public Engagement) – *After...*

10.00am **Provocations 1**

- Anna Darron (Science Museum) – *Missed Connections: A Provocation for a More Unified Museum Sector.*
- Tanisa Gunsekera & Maheema Chanrai (British Museum & Bristol Museums) – *Museums Need Multiple Perspectives.*
- Dee Matthews (Lotherton Hall, Leeds) – *The Identity Crisis: Can Museum Learning Officers Be All Things to All People?*

11.00am Coffee

11.20am **Keynote 2**

- Fran Hegyi (cultural policy consultant) – *Future Funding.*

11.35am **Provocations 2**

- Laura Crossley (freelance) – *Museums for All? (Even Practitioners?)*
- Subhadra Das (UCL Museums, London) – *Happily Never After: Tales from the Disposable Museum.*
- Dan Feeney (National Portrait Gallery, London) – *The Curator-less Museum.*

12.35pm Introduction to the afternoon

12.45pm Lunch

1.45pm **Manifesto debating & drafting**

3.00pm Group feedback

3.45pm Decision-making

4.45pm Final remarks

5.00pm Scheduled end