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# **Character Matters: attitudes, behaviours and skills in the UK Museum workforce**

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Summary Report by BOP Consulting  
with the Museum Consultancy

Commissioned by Arts Council England, Museums  
Galleries Scotland, Museums Association,  
Association of Independent Museums

**September 2016**

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# Contents



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Introduction	3
Recommendations	4
Recruitment	4
Skills and knowledge	5
Training and continuing professional development (CPD)	5
Organisational development	6
Sector development	6
Methodology	7
Research aims	7
Research questions	7
Key findings	8
Key challenges	10
Character matters	11

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# Introduction

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This research into the UK museums workforce is the first of its kind. Through significant evidence based on 2000 online survey responses, interviews and consultations it is clear that professional and personal development should be a priority for everyone in the sector and be better resourced.

This summary provides an overview of the key research findings and identified future challenges for the sector. Also set out are an ambitious set of recommendations for everyone working in the sector to take ownership of. These recommendations support the development of a museum workforce (including the volunteer workforce) that is well-equipped to respond to upcoming challenges and maximise the opportunities the sector may encounter in the future. [Details on the full report which includes detailed survey findings can be found at the end of this summary].

Museums in the UK have undergone major change in the past 10 years, from reduced funding streams and the development of new business models, to changing approaches to audience engagement and participation. It is likely that the next 10 years will continue to see rapid change across the sector from how museums operate to how they engage with audiences. It is crucial that the museum sector is well prepared to adapt to and respond to these changes and pressures. The museum workforce will face a growing need to adapt and develop new skills, knowledge and ways of working in order to meet the needs of the organisations and audiences they serve.

In recognition of these pressures, Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, the Museums Association and the Association of Independent Museums have commissioned BOP Consulting and the Museum Consultancy to undertake this timely piece of research into the current and future needs of the museums workforce.

Drawing on a series of interviews, consultations and analysis of over 2000 online survey responses this research examines the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours currently held by the museum workforce. This research, the first of its kind, provides a comprehensive snapshot of the UK museum workforce (including volunteers) and will provide a baseline for measures of progress. This research also suggests future skills and attitudes needed within the workforce to ensure the resilience and success of the museums in the next 10 years.

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# Recommendations

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Developing the workforce that the museum sector needs in the future is the responsibility of everyone working in the sector: heritage organisations, employers, sector bodies, funders, employees and volunteers. The following set of recommendations have been developed so that everyone working in the sector can play a part in encouraging and developing the attitudes, behaviours, skills and knowledge that the UK museum workforce needs.

## Recruitment

1. Employers should pilot non-traditional recruitment methods for some of their short-term posts, which allow for greater flexibility in hiring choices. This should include trialling competency frameworks during recruitment.
2. Sector bodies should consider establishing a group to review HR practices and produce best practice guidance, which ideally reflects different organisational contexts. This group should look at:
  - What is legal? What is optional?
  - What can be done to attract a wider range of talent?
  - How could current recruitment processes be adapted?
  - What are best practice recruitment examples from other sectors that museums could learn from?
  - What is best practice for attracting and managing volunteers?
3. Sector bodies should commit to updating and extending the Museums Association's salary guidelines which organisations, employers and individuals can refer to. This update should include consideration of different organisational sizes and contexts.
4. Museums and sector bodies should develop recruitment campaigns that promote the sector as a place to work. This could involve developing messages that give insight into what it is like to work in museums, and the broad range of skills and "personal qualities" needed.
5. Museums should develop traineeships at a management level to support and encourage talented people with transferable skills to work in the sector at a senior level.
6. More museums should be offering taster experiences to young people at key times when they are making subject and career decisions.
7. Sector bodies such as Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS) should work with employers to understand how to improve the quality and uptake of apprenticeships, including the Modern Apprenticeship programme.
8. Sector bodies should clarify their commitment to workforce development and aim to align their resources to develop good practice in the sector, developed as a result of recommendation 2.
9. Sector bodies should consider the creation of a formal programme of secondments to provide opportunities for people from other sectors, such as business and technology, to gain experience of working in museums and to share their experience.

*Recruit for attitude, as equal to skills and experience.*

AIM conference delegate

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## Recommendations continued

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### Skills and knowledge

10. Subject Specialist Networks, including those formally supported by the Arts Council, play an essential role in curatorial knowledge exchange and should have increased capacity (supported by additional funding) and a clear remit to provide opportunities to ensure the development and retention of collections based knowledge.
11. Museums should ensure that the importance of developing and maintaining collections knowledge is championed in their organisation and built into relevant job roles; museums should ensure that staff and volunteer time in contributing to these Subject Specialist Networks is recognised and supported.
12. Sector bodies should create funding opportunities to support skills and knowledge development throughout the sector. Key areas for development include:
  - developing and applying digital skills
  - developing further business, management and leadership skills

*Leadership is a key area to develop. Leaders need training on how to appoint people who are not mirror images of themselves. They need to model the attitudes and behaviours that they want to see.*

Museum director

### Training and continuing professional development (CPD)

13. Individuals should proactively explore new learning and development opportunities to further their own professional development and contribution to the sector. These opportunities could include developing key qualities, skills and expertise within the museums sector or in other sectors.
14. Individuals should seek out opportunities to work with a mentor, as well as training to become a mentor themselves, and employers should support this development activity.
15. Organisations should aim to have a significant percentage of their workforce undertaking some form of mentoring or coaching. Sector bodies should consider establishing a suggested recommended minimum percentage baseline of the workforce that are supported by a mentor or coach.
16. Organisations should also commit to allowing all staff and volunteers a minimum target of days per year to dedicate to CPD activities, as appropriate to the scale of the organisation.
17. Sector bodies should create funding opportunities to support workforce development; for example, to support groups within the sector who unite around a common focus, such as their geography, specialism or community of practice.
18. Sector bodies or museums should develop a range of new, museum specific short courses aimed at current skills gaps, i.e. business, management or interpersonal skills where appropriate.
19. Sector bodies and museums should develop further programmes to help leaders grow within their organisation and into leadership positions, and to develop leadership training for all segments of the workforce, not just senior level staff.

*Is there a way to create a national pool of mentors for people "outwith" AMA/FMA routes?*

AIM conference delegate

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## Recommendations continued

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### Organisational development

20. Employers should ensure that job descriptions, volunteer profiles and person specifications accurately reflect the attitudes, behaviours and skills required for different roles.
21. Employers should make better use of line management systems, the appraisal process and personal development plans to encourage members of their workforce to set out a broad range of development goals and activities.
22. Employers should explore opportunities to develop their workforce – such as allowing employees to move into new roles within organisations, or offering short term roles (on a secondment or project basis) that provide new experiences or insights into museum operations. Museums should consider ways to promote movement and collaboration within organisations such as secondments from “front of house” to “back of house” roles.
23. Museums should increase their collaborations with the business and enterprise community to support the development of entrepreneurial attitudes, behaviours and skills.
24. Museums should explore the possibilities of mentoring and coaching schemes from those working in the business and enterprise community (including shadowing opportunities) in order to develop breadth of skill and experience.
25. The UK Accreditation Partners should further develop the Accreditation Guidance on workforce development opportunities in light of the findings in this report.
26. Current best practice guidance on board of trustees’ development, such as AIM guidance, should be promoted more widely across the sector and refreshed on a regular basis, to ensure an appropriate mix of skills and “personal qualities” to develop a wide and versatile board.

### Sector development

27. Sector bodies should celebrate workforce development best practice stories and organisational and individual wins, and should develop the ability to advocate for the role, purpose and benefits of museums in society.
28. Sector bodies and employers should ensure that initiatives and approaches to diversify the workforce encompass the broadest definition of diversity, and are tailored to reflect regional and local needs. Sector bodies should encourage museums to report on and evaluate the diversity of their workforce (including socio-economic diversity as well as the existing protected characteristics) to assess if current and proposed diversity measures are effective.
29. Funders, where appropriate, should require recipients to demonstrate a clear and active commitment to opening up and diversifying the workforce. This could include measurements such as number of apprenticeships, taster days and school and college work experience placements offered.
30. Funders, where appropriate, should require recipients to demonstrate a clear and active commitment to CPD. This should include measurements such as the number of staff or volunteers undertaking formal training, the number participating in a network, and steps they have taken to share knowledge (eg by hosting a training session, mentoring etc).

*Workforce development is essential to museum resilience – it needs to be kept front of mind.*

Museum director

*We need to foster greater risk taking at organisational level.*

Workshop attendee

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## Methodology

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Consulting the sector widely was an essential part of this research to ensure that the findings reflect, as far as possible, its views and needs. In order to do this the research included both quantitative and qualitative methods, and was carried out in the following ways:

- **Online workforce survey:** this included museum volunteers as well as paid employees, and was responded to by over 2,000 people
- **A literature review:** of both museum-specific material and wider, non-museum-specific literature on “personal qualities” and their importance in the labour market
- **Consultation:** five UK-wide museum sector workshops were held in both England and Scotland
- **Interviews:** eight one-to-one interviews were undertaken with museum directors, in addition to one-to-one interviews with steering group members
- **Analysis of recruitment materials:** looking at a sample of 59 job adverts and job descriptions representing a range of roles, grades and types of organisations

The research was overseen by a steering group made up of members of the commissioning bodies.

## Research aims



- To identify the attitudes, behaviours and skills needed in the UK museum workforce for the next 10 years
- To explore how museums can recruit or support people to develop these

## Research questions

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This project set out to answer three key research questions:

- What attitudes, behaviours and skills does the UK museum workforce need in the next 10 years?
- What are museums currently asking for? What are they paying to get this and how does this compare to other sectors?
- What attitudes, behaviours and skills does the museum workforce currently have? How are these supported across the sector?

*Be tenacious and don't give up...you have to be pretty determined to get things done. Don't stop loving what you do, it's definitely worth all the effort.*

Art curator's advice to new entrants

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# Key findings

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The key findings of the research, in many respects, reflect some of the widely acknowledged challenges and issues facing the sector. Other findings from the survey explore some of the harder to draw out attitudinal, emotional and personal motivational elements that affect and influence the workforce. The key findings of the research include (unless otherwise indicated, percentages refer to survey responses):

- There is a drive towards more stable and financially resilient museums, which are diversifying income streams while also seeking to expand their social impact with audiences.
- There is new emphasis towards a more diverse, flexible workforce that can bring new skills, energy and ideas into and across the sector. Employers are looking for “T-shaped” people who can combine a specialism with a broad range of other skills and knowledge.
- There is also an acknowledged need for improved collaboration in terms of sharing resources, knowledge and ideas in order to support future visions for the sector.
- The priority skills gaps that were identified reflect the overall drive towards improved museum resilience. These skills include a wide range of business and management skills to support income diversification, embedding digital skills across all organisational levels and better leadership skills across organisations and/or at all levels within organisations.
- Retaining and protecting specialist knowledge and heritage-specific skills, while broadening roles and encouraging collaboration across specialisms, is a significant challenge for the future.
- A number of key “personal qualities” emerged as priorities for the workforce, such as conscientiousness, optimism, motivation, self-efficacy, persistence, curiosity, creativity and the ability and willingness to learn and collaborate.
- Some “personal qualities” can be influenced and changed while others such as self-efficacy are generally thought to be relatively fixed by the time people reach adulthood. Therefore, museums will need a two-pronged approach of careful skills development that helps to nurture some of these “personal qualities”, as well as more innovative recruitment methods to develop a more diverse, well-rounded workforce who can meet the needs of tomorrow’s museums.
- Most job adverts require high levels of education, with only 30 per cent stating they would consider equivalent experience rather than a formal qualification.
- Aside from specialist skills, communication and time management were the most commonly emphasised skills in job adverts, while passion and being a team player were the most common “personal qualities”.
- A small majority (55 per cent) of the sector earned less than the UK average wage in 2015 of £27,600.
- Salary levels look relatively average overall but given their high levels of education, the museum workforce is paid on average lower than many other comparable sectors.
- Those with specialist skills such as curation or conservation tend to earn above the UK average wage while those in front of house roles earn well below.
- Although there are more women than men in the museums workforce, on average men still earn more and are more likely to hold senior management positions.
- Overall the majority of the museums workforce is made up of white women and by those with a high level of education (88 per cent hold a first degree while 59 per cent hold a second degree).
- Most hold long-term or permanent contracts, although there has been a recent shift in the past three years towards short-term contracts.
- Many in the workforce have spent a significant amount of time undertaking work experience in order to break into sector. Over half of these placements were unpaid and many were for nine months or more.
- Increasingly the workforce is being asked to do more for no additional monetary reward. Many of the workforce have remained in the same role in the past three years, but over a third report an increased level of responsibilities with no corresponding increase in pay.
- Findings reflect a growing focus on income generation within museums with 22 per cent of the workforce reporting that income generating activities have been added to their job description in the past three years.
- Over 70 per cent of the workforce is engaged in training and CPD, most of it initiated by themselves. However, training is rarely targeted to the needs of the individual and the individual organisation. The most common form of CPD reported is attendance



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## Key findings continued



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at conferences. Training and CPD is also dominated by heritage-specific training, with much lower rates of business or management training reported.

- Notably, rates of mentorship, coaching and job secondments, which are arguably some of the most tailored forms of CPD that also help develop “personal qualities”, were very low.
- In response to validated psychology questions which reveal some of the workforce’s “personal qualities”, as well as their attitudes towards their organisations, the following findings emerged:
  - Overall the workforce has a strong emotional commitment to their jobs and higher levels of self-efficacy than average. Less positively, the workforce is slightly more pessimistic and more risk averse than average.
  - Respondents are quite critical of their organisations, reporting low rates of co-operation across organisations and poor handling of change management and innovation. They give senior management a lower rating than average and feel that the career development support they receive is low.
  - Freelancers and those in management roles stand out as being more motivated to achieve results, more optimistic and with a higher tendency to take risks than the workforce as a whole.
- Volunteers are emotionally committed and passionate about the museum sector, contributing a high number of hours to museums, but they also receive little training or support.
- In terms of attitude to the sector as a whole, the large majority of the workforce still strongly believes that the sector should be entitled to significant government funding given the public service that museums provide. Further, a sizeable minority of the workforce see the requirement to balance commercial goals with a public service mission as inherently challenging.

*A wider definition of diversity needs to be more explicit. Let's be really inclusive, beyond ethnicity and disability.*

Museum director

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## Key challenges

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The findings of the research have highlighted three key challenges for the museum sector to address, if it is going to have the workforce needed for the next 10 years of change and evolution. These challenges are:

- How to recruit a more diverse workforce (both paid and volunteer) into the sector in general, including people with more of the kinds of “personal qualities” that are identified as assets in an environment that will likely increasingly emphasise adaptability, entrepreneurialism and fewer deep specialisms?
- How to develop the existing workforce, not just in terms of skills, but also in terms of developing their “personal qualities”, particularly given that some of these qualities are difficult to change?
- How to get organisations themselves to be more flexible, agile and entrepreneurial and supportive of their workforce?

*A more flexible workforce is critical to achieving success – not just staff willing to pick up a wider range of tasks but institutions drawing on a range of experiences and insights.*

Museum director

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# Character matters



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## Attitudes, behaviours and skills for the UK museum workforce – full report

The full version of the report can be downloaded here:

[http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE\\_Museums\\_Workforce\\_ABS\\_BOP\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/ACE_Museums_Workforce_ABS_BOP_Final_Report.pdf)

The full report contains the comprehensive research that was carried out for this project, including a detailed breakdown of the survey responses. The full report contents are:

1. Introduction
2. Attitudes, behaviours and skills for the future museum workforce
3. The workforce today: recruitment and pay analysis
4. The workforce today: online survey results
5. Recommendations
6. Conclusions
7. Appendix 1: Literature review
8. Appendix 2: Bibliography
9. Appendix 3: Museum size
10. Appendix 4: Participants in workshops and interviews
11. Appendix 5: Data table



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