

# Volunteering in the UK Museums Sector: The Case of Aspiring Museum Professionals

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## **Abstract**

Aspiring museums professionals frequently have to volunteer independent of formal study programmes, in order to gain paid work in the UK museums sector. However, volunteering for work experience has been largely ignored by previous studies of museum volunteers. This paper reports on a postal questionnaire and interviews with both volunteers and managers to gain insight into the extent of work experience volunteering and the experiences of these would-be museum workers. A key problem for museums is the resources needed to provide meaningful internships. For volunteers, a good internship is almost entirely due to luck and finding a mentor. However, the lack of entry level posts, combining with a shortage of apparently suitable applicants for paid positions means that museums may be facing a recruitment crisis.

## **Keywords**

Museums, internships, volunteering, workforce development

## **Introduction**

The museums sector in the UK is consistently popular as a source of employment and there is considerable competition for paid positions. Yet this is despite UK museums' poor record in human resource management (Lennon & Graham, 2001). Indeed a review of the museums sector for the government's Museums, Libraries and Archives Council highlighted a number of shortcomings including poor pay and conditions; a lack of a clear career pathway; a narrow recruitment pool; low turnover, hindering progression of junior staff; budget constraints leading to only 48% of museums having their own training budget and a lack of reward, due in part to the organisational culture that has developed at museums, with divisions between professional and non-professional staff (Demos, 2003). As a result, individuals need to be able to manage their own career, including their own professional development.

These shortcomings clearly have implications for the future of the museums workforce, yet the competition for paid posts has led to a situation whereby entry level applicants need to be both highly qualified and also demonstrate a strong commitment to the sector. As well as having a good first degree and a postgraduate degree, prospective museum employees need "to demonstrate your commitment to the museum cause by putting in some voluntary work." (Carrington, 2001:23). Volunteering has widely been accepted as a means of entry into the museums sector for many years, with the Museums and Galleries Commission's (MGC) review of professional training and career structure, in 1987 criticising volunteering as a prerequisite for entry into the museums profession (Museums & Galleries Commission, 1987). This is a

particular concern as the financial restrictions of unpaid work mean that this is a prohibitive requirement for many people wishing to join the profession, particularly at a time when the sector seeks to increase the diversity of its workforce (Sandell, 2001).

While the UK museums sector involves a large number of volunteers, with 92% of museums involving volunteers (Resource, 2002), research has focused on older socially-motivated volunteers (Smith, 2002; Holmes, 2003) and the experiences of younger, experience-seekers have been overlooked, with no recent data on this phenomenon. These younger, experience-seekers form a significant subsection of the volunteer workforce, with the National Trust for England and Wales finding that 21% of their volunteers hoped their activities might provide a route to full-time employment (The National Trust, 1998).

This paper addresses the paucity of research on work experience seeking volunteers in the museums sector, by examining the scope and nature of work experience volunteering, the experiences and needs of aspiring museum professionals, who are volunteering for work experience, and the support provided by their host institutions. The needs of the host institutions are also considered. Conclusions are drawn on the wider implications for the future of the museums workforce in the UK.

## **The Value of Unpaid Work Experience**

“Practical experience has become an integral part of museum training” (Danilov, 1994:138), but this can take many forms including an internship, a practicum, an apprenticeship, a traineeship, a field placement, work/study or simply work experience. All of these involve the aspiring museum professional gaining experience in a museum environment. Most formal museum training programmes based at universities and colleges include an element of work experience, which the student must complete in order to gain the qualification. In the United States this is referred to as an internship, but in the UK is more often termed a work placement (Danilov, 1994). In addition, in the US many museums offer structured internships independent of a formal study programme. Internships sometimes have a stipend attached to them but are often unpaid. These independently offered structured internships are rare in the UK, however competition for and the lack of entry level posts in museums means that aspiring museum professionals often need to undertake unpaid work experience in a museum in order to apply successfully for paid employment. The Museums Association, the professional body for museum professionals in the UK, states on their web site “You are unlikely to get a foot on the career ladder without some work experience, which means becoming a museum volunteer” (<http://www.museumsassociation.org>) and notes that prospective volunteers should not restrict their applications to national and large regional museums for work experience as these museums may already be oversubscribed by volunteers.

Volunteering for work experience in the UK is no new phenomenon necessitated by an increased number of museum studies graduates. Mattingly conducted the first systematic study of volunteers in museums and galleries in the early 1980s and found that museum managers believed the second most common reason for volunteering in their museum was to gain experience of museum work (Mattingly, 1984). The MGC’s working party on museum professional training and career structure noted in 1987 that people undertake voluntary work as “junior museum posts and the pre-entry training courses are heavily subscribed” (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1987: 26). The working party were concerned by this reliance on gaining work experience through volunteering, as they believed this restricted entry into the museums profession to those who could work for free; that it promoted the image of museum work as

amateur, rather than highly skilled and professional; and covered up staff shortages, where full time paid staff should have been recruited instead of relying on volunteers. Similar criticisms are frequently raised in the letters page of the Museums Association's newsletter, the Museums Journal, which regularly features correspondence from frustrated aspiring museum professionals commented on the difficulties of gaining paid entry level positions in museums and the financial restrictions of undertaking voluntary work. One reader writes, "I was shocked to read \_\_\_\_'s comments about claiming job seeker's allowance [unemployment insurance] while being a volunteer. This suggests that museums...encourage healthy and intelligent people to live off tax payer's money with the result that museums get 'free trainees. In any other industry it is normal to pay your trainee a wage..." (Museums Journal, 2004:14).

Universities and colleges can ensure that students gain a certain level of experience during their internships or work placements, but how valuable is independently gained voluntary work experience, other than as a ticked box on an application form? The American Association of Museums (AAM) set standards for internships in 1978, stating that a university-sponsored internship should be a minimum of 6 months in length and an independent internship should be 12 months long, as it will not be supported by a programme of study. They argued that internships should be full-time; that interns should have a written agreement with the museum, stating their duties and the aims of the internship; interns should be given a discrete project to complete and prepare a report on their experience (Danilov, 1994). There are no such guidelines from the UK Museums Association and very few university museums studies programmes provide a full-time 6 months work placement. A 12 months unpaid full-time internship is a very serious financial commitment for an aspiring museum professional. The AAM also noted that problems with internships most commonly arose due to the intern being given menial or inappropriate tasks, poor supervision or because of the intern's lack of effort. Advice from the American Association for State and Local History recommends that museums provide a stipend of at least \$500 dollars for a 12 week placement and help interns find affordable accommodation if they are from outside the region. They also recommend providing the intern with a brief induction to the museum and its aims and to encourage the intern to become involved in the full cultural life of the museum's locality (Comp & Rogers, 1996). Glaser adds to this by stating that the best museum internships are when one member of staff writes the intern's job description, monitors and advises their performance at all stages of the internship and evaluates their performance at the end (Glaser & Zenetou, 1996).

A study of architecture internships in the US found that diverse experiences and quality mentoring are the keys to a successful internship, though architecture firms struggle to provide these as they do not have the time available to provide a rich mentoring experience and may view their internships as a source of cheap labour (Quinn, 2003). This is a possible scenario in the UK museums sector, where museums are frequently under-resourced. Quinn argues that to improve internships in the field of architecture, there should be a core set of competencies, which form the basis for the internship programme. This would enable future employers to assess the value of the work experience undertaken. The International Council of Museums has developed a core curriculum for museums training, but gives no such advice for internships ([museumstudies.si.edu/ICOM-ICTOP/index.htm](http://museumstudies.si.edu/ICOM-ICTOP/index.htm)).

## **Volunteering and Work/Leisure**

A further question is whether volunteering out of necessity actually constitutes volunteering? Leisure studies researchers hypothesise that all the activities an individual does during the day

fit into four categories: work-related time, unobligated time (such as leisure), obligatory time (such as cooking and cleaning) and sleep (Henderson, 1984). Volunteering features in unobligated time, as does leisure. Thus, leisure researchers argue that volunteering is a leisure activity, albeit a *serious* leisure activity. Casual leisure and serious leisure are differentiated by the commitment they demand from their participants. For example, casual leisure can be described as an “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins, 1997:18). This could include reading the newspaper, watching television or sociable conversation.

Serious leisure refers to activities, which demand the occasional need to persevere, within which participants are able to develop a career and which demand significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training or skill. While serious leisure demands more from the participant, the benefits can also be greater, including “self actualisation, self-enrichment, recreation or renewal of oneself, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, lasting physical products of the activity” (Stebbins, 1992: 7). Since volunteering demands effort on the part of the volunteer it is considered to be serious leisure. Stebbins notes in particular that leisure volunteering is inspired by self-interest on the part of the volunteer and that serious leisure volunteering is career volunteering, rather than a one-off act or a series of sporadic acts of volunteering such as giving blood (Stebbins, 2001).

Volunteering as a leisure activity seems an appropriate categorisation for the unpaid enthusiasts who help out at museums and galleries across the world, with no aspirations to gain paid work in these organisations. Yet are aspiring museum professionals pursuing serious leisure when they undertake voluntary work experience in museums? Volunteering has been further conceptualised by distinguishing leisure volunteering as one of four types of volunteering, based on the individual’s motivation. The other three are altruistic volunteering (entailing an unselfish concern for others), cause-serving volunteering (for moral, political, environmental or religious purposes) and market volunteering – to meet one’s need for work experience (Parker, 1997). Clearly, volunteering for work experience falls into this last category. However, if an individual is obligated to volunteer – in this case in order to gain paid employment - rather than chooses to volunteer, does this mean that they are not engaging in the activity voluntarily? To further complicate this debate, the style of volunteer management largely adopted by the UK museums sector treats volunteers as unremunerated employees (Holmes, 2003). Therefore, an examination of the experiences and meaning of volunteering in order to gain work experience, helps to conceptualise volunteering on a continuum between work and leisure.

## Methods

Two methods were employed in this study: a postal questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, while it is possible to find out how many museum studies students have to undertake work placements as part of their programme of study, there is currently no data examining how widespread volunteering independently of a university programme in order to gain work experience leading to paid employment is in the UK museums sector. Secondly, in order to examine the benefits and drawbacks of volunteering for work experience, the experiences of volunteers themselves were needed, as were the opinions managers in museums, with responsibility for recruitment. In order to address the first question, a postal questionnaire was sent to all museums in the Yorkshire region, in England with the assistance of the Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The Yorkshire region was chosen as the sample as it includes a similar diversity of museums compared to the rest of England’s

Museums, Libraries and Archive Council regions. There are 92 museums within the Yorkshire region and a total of 73 responses were received, giving a response rate of 79%. The questionnaire results were analysed using SPSS 12.0 for windows.

A variety of interviewees were sought, including current and former volunteers and managers from museums sector. Volunteers were recruited through the email discussion list for the Group for Education in Museums and also using the snowballing technique. In particular, individuals who were undertaking, or had completed, voluntary work experience outside of a formal programme of study were targeted. However, since many of these respondents had also completed, or were in the process of, a museum-related qualification, they also had experience of formal work placements. In addition, both current and former volunteers were sought. Current volunteers were able to give vivid accounts of their experiences as these were ongoing. Former volunteers may not have had such clear memories of their experiences, but could comment on their usefulness in obtaining paid employment. Managers with responsibility for human resources were purposively recruited to the study and all but one were from museums within the Yorkshire region. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 volunteers and 7 managers and were all recorded and transcribed for analysis. The volunteer respondents included 7 current volunteers and 5 former volunteers. The managers represented both public sector and charitable trust museums. Two museums were museums trusts, where a charitable trust operates a local authority's museum service. The institutions represented by the managers were two historic houses, a science centre, two museum trusts, a local authority museum service and an art gallery. The semi-structured interviews were analysed using template analysis (King, 1998). Template analysis is similar to content analysis; however keywords and concepts are allowed to arise from the data for each interview script and are then cross-referenced with the other interviews.

## Discussion

### Characteristics of volunteering for work experience

The survey revealed that volunteering per se is widespread within the Yorkshire region, with 82% of museums in the survey involving volunteers, slightly lower than the national average of 92% (Resource, 2002). However, those volunteering specifically to gain work experience leading to paid employment in the sector is a smaller, but still significant proportion of the total, with 28 out of 73 museums reporting that they had or are hosting these volunteers. Most frequently this is on a very small scale, with only one or two volunteers engaged in work experience at the museum at a time, although this is a regular activity, with organisations reportedly hosting up to 15 volunteers over the preceding six months. Nearly two-thirds, 64%, of the volunteers hosted were volunteering as part of a programme of study, leaving one third, 36%, who had engaged in volunteering independently. There is no reason why these statistics would not be replicated in other regions in England and independent volunteering may be more common in London, where there are a large number of museums and several universities offering museum studies programmes.

The interviews with the volunteers show that aspiring museum professionals may have to undertake unpaid work experience at three stages before gaining a paid position:

1. In order to gain a place on a postgraduate museums programme;
2. The postgraduate programmes themselves usually include an unpaid work placement; and
3. On completion of a postgraduate programme of study they may have to continue to volunteer to gain additional skills and experience in order to find paid work.

In addition, three of the volunteer respondents had already pursued careers in other fields and wanted to change career. One commented that it is difficult to find out information about museum work and that volunteering is a good way of doing this. Generally there was a feeling of being “overqualified but under-experienced” and that in newer, more specialist areas of museum work volunteering was more useful than formal qualifications. This was also noted by one manager, who stated that while in the past aspiring museum professionals might have gained a paid post in one area of work and then moved across to work in the field they were really interested in, with front of house positions often providing a route into paid work, this is becoming more difficult as areas of work become both more specialised and more professionalized.

The survey respondents hosted work experience seekers for periods ranging from 3 weeks to 5 years; however the modal length of an internship was 6 months and the mean 8 months. This does not conform to the AAM's recommendation for 12 months long full-time internships (Danilov, 1994). In particular, the volunteers themselves were unlikely to be volunteering full-time, mostly due to financial restrictions. While 4 of the volunteers had volunteered for at least 12 months and 3 of them for longer, this was usually combined with part-time paid work, with volunteering only taking up 1-2 days a week during this period. Six of the volunteers supported themselves through part time paid work and four were able to gain paid work through their host institution, on a casual basis, for example, helping with education projects. Two respondents, who were qualified teachers, found it easier to gain casual paid work with their host museum, as they had proven experience of dealing with people, especially children and had also undergone a criminal records bureau check. Other forms of financial support included relying on relatives, either husbands or parents, bank overdrafts and educational grants or fee waivers, which covered course fees and meant that the respondents had more time to volunteer, rather than earn money, while studying. The need to rely on relatives reinforces the concern that the requirement to volunteer in order to gain a paid position may discourage aspiring museum professionals from poorer backgrounds.

All the volunteers had approached their host institution, usually through writing a letter. As none of the volunteers took part in a structured internship programme, their experiences did not conform to the AAM's guidelines for internships, that is they did not have a written agreement with the museum, no clearly stated objectives and did not write a report at the end of their experience. Moreover, none of the respondents were provided with any form of stipend or financial recompense. Several respondents did become involved in discrete projects during their volunteering. For example, Janine worked in a museum education department putting together loan boxes for certain historical periods and Natalie was working, with others, on a digitisation project, writing captions and scanning objects and slides. Of the survey respondents, 10 museums provided supervision and training for their volunteers; 5 offered a special work programme; 3 provided formal or structured mentoring; 2 offered volunteers an induction programme and paid expenses.

Good volunteering experiences for the respondents depended very much on working with an interested paid member of staff, who became a mentor, though this arrangement was largely informal. This was noted by one of the managers, who commented that while there is no formal internship programme at her museum, curators sometimes agreed to take on a volunteer on an individual basis. The importance of a ‘rich mentoring experience’ as part of an internship was noted by both Glaser and Quinn. Gilly's case demonstrates though how far this seems to be a matter of luck: Gilly was studying for an undergraduate degree in archaeology and wanted to work in museums. In her second year she contacted a local museum and the Museum Director seemed very pleased to have her volunteering at the museum, but passed her to work with the



Education Officer. The Education Officer did not seem to know what to do with her and she spent her time photocopying and filling envelopes. The museum began a project with another local museum, which brought her into contact with the Social History Curator, Kim and “Kim was wonderful!” Kim involved Gilly in cataloguing, arranging cases and writing labels, each time explaining why museums did things in a certain way. Kim then began to do outreach work with the local community and Gilly became involved with this. Gilly continued her studies with a part time Masters degree in archaeology and for a further 6 months after that, when she was job-seeking. She recalls feeling “down in the dumps and thinking I should have done a museum studies course” when Kim pointed out a job advert to her for a Community Education Worker. Kim helped Gilly fill in the job application and wrote a reference for her and Gilly got the job!

Aside from actually gaining relevant work experience to strengthen applications for paid work, the volunteers reported that other benefits from their volunteering were support for their academic study, opportunities for paid work and getting good references to use when applying for paid positions. As these internships were not taken as a part of a formal university or college programme, the additional support for the volunteers’ academic study was unexpected and mostly related to students’ dissertations. This included help in kind, for example Janine was able to use the computer in the office to type up her dissertation and gained access to collections and people as part of the fieldwork for her dissertation. Three volunteers were able to gain casual or temporary paid work through their volunteering. For example, Madalyn was working as a paid Museum Assistant in the Visitor Services department of the museum and also volunteering with the Education Officer. She has since been paid to run schools’ workshops. Deborah used the contacts she developed through her volunteering to set herself up as a freelance museums consultant. None of the respondents had been offered a full time paid position with any of the museums they volunteered with.

While the survey respondents reported that it was their professional duty to assist aspiring museum professionals, 54% stated that they would like additional support to enable them to do so. Most commonly they requested this from the university or college, whose students they were hosting as part of a work placement. Yet the second most commonly requested source for help was the local Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, who are probably in the best position to provide some form of assistance, since they currently take responsibility for the professional development of staff in museums in their region. The museum respondents requested advice on hosting volunteers and how to manage them, training for the volunteers they are hosting and the museums wanted to be able to offer some form of financial recompense. They reported that the biggest constraints on taking on a volunteer placement, whether independently or as part of a formal university or college programme, were resources, usually staff time and work space. There was also concern that these volunteers had unrealistic expectations of what they could, or would, be able to do while volunteering. This concern was substantiated by the manager from one of the museum trusts, who felt that universities did not manage museum studies graduates’ expectations very well.

In contrast, the volunteer respondents were realistic about the difficulties of getting paid work in the museums sector. Six interviewees commented that there were too many people competing for too few posts and were aware of what they would need to do to gain a paid position. For example, Lucy commented, “It will be very hard to get a position, but if you’re keen enough then you’ll be flexible about where you go and the kinds of jobs you’ll do”, and Jack noted that he would probably have gained a paid job by now, if he was more flexible about where in the UK he was prepared to move to. The volunteers also thought that there were too many museum studies programmes, creating too many graduates for the entry level posts available. This was contrasted with the archives sector in the UK, where the Society of Archivists only recognises 4

university programmes, so most graduates are able to find employment. While this moves the point of competition to applying for a place on a course, for which again unpaid work experience is usually a prerequisite (Society of Archivists, 2004), it may save unsuccessful candidates the time and expense of undertaking a postgraduate programme and then having continuing to volunteer in order to secure paid work. Interestingly, the working party on museum professional training and career structure (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1987) criticised the small number of university programmes available to prospective museum professionals as insufficient to reflect the growing diversity of museum work.

### **A Recruitment Crisis in the Museums Sector?**

The interviews with the managers revealed a potential crisis in the museums sector. While they stated that there is a shortage of suitable applicants for paid posts, they also noted that they were not able to offer either paid traineeships or unpaid internships. The political nature of funding for projects under the Government's Renaissance in the Regions programme, designed to transform regional museums, means that employees must deliver results quickly, so there is no time to take on anyone in a trainee position. Indeed one manager stated that the current recruitment market for museums is simply moving people around, rather than bringing in anyone new to the sector and that this is particularly the case in education work. In contrast all managers reported a low turnover in staff, which reduced the number of posts available for new entrants, but could also be demotivating to staff wanting to progress within museums from lower level posts.

In addition, museum training budgets are very small. Two museums had annual training budgets of £20 000, with staffs of c100 and c150 and stated that they had the largest training budgets museum in the Yorkshire region. This is also clearly linked to the poor training provision in most museums, identified by Demos (2003). The public sector museums stated that they were under constant pressure to reduce costs and since staffing is the biggest cost, then this is often where savings are sought. One manager from a museums trust did say that museums ought to be providing meaningful internships, allowing aspiring museum professionals to make mistakes in a supportive environment. However, she feels that her staff is currently under resourced so she cannot ask them to take on such volunteers. A manager from another museum trust argued that hub museums (the big regional museums leading the Renaissance in the Regions programme) will have to take the lead in bringing in new blood.

The volunteer respondents particularly commented on the lack of career structure within museums, which made entry into paid employment less straightforward than other sectors. Tracey, who was changing mid-career from accountancy to museums, commented that "museums seem hidden away" and "there are no obvious ways of finding out information about the museums sector." Madalyn felt that there was a lack of agreement between museums on what experience and qualifications different level posts required, again a criticism raised by the 1987 working party on museum training and career structure and Janine stated that getting into museum work is "a lot to do with your connections and being in the right place at the right time, rather than your skills or experience." She cited the example of a fellow student on her Masters degree, who obtained unpaid work experience at the nearby museum as the curator visited the bar she worked in. The volunteer respondents also noted the small number of entry-level posts and the low turnover amongst existing staff as barriers to their ability to gain paid employment in museums.



## Is Volunteering Work or Leisure

The volunteer respondents viewed their experiences as work-based, rather than leisure-based, even though they were not paid. Their motivations clearly placed them within the market volunteering category, described by Parker (1997), rather than leisure volunteering. However, the length of time spent volunteering and the range of different roles undertaken by volunteers at different museums could also class this as career volunteering. For example, Lisa volunteered at one museum, while working 4 days a week, in order to gain a place on a postgraduate museums studies programme. She then undertook a formal work placement at another museum one day a week as part of her study programme, while also volunteering at a third museum in order to gain additional experience in handling objects, which she felt she was lacking. She was also continuing to volunteer at her placement museum for much longer than her university required. Experience of market volunteering may also lead into leisure volunteering, once paid work has been procured. Steve was the only volunteer respondent who had gained paid work in the museums sector through his experience alone and did not have a formal museums-related qualification. Although he has a paid post he has since volunteered to join a working group to increase the membership for the Friends of another museum. It could be argued that with 3 years work experience in the museums sector, Steve doesn't need to volunteer for work experience now, so this may be more akin to leisure volunteering.

In contrast, the managers' responses showed that they did have distinctions between volunteers and paid staff, particularly in what they felt they could reasonably ask volunteers to do. All but one of the managers viewed volunteers as supplementary, rather than essential to their museum and two managers felt it was unreasonable to ask volunteers to do a job someone else was being paid to do. One of the museum trusts considered recruiting volunteers as a different way of enabling access to the museum and its collections that is volunteers are part of the museum's audience. Thus, there was no agreement on whether volunteers constituted unpaid workers, supporters of the museum (as members of the Friends) or active visitors.

## Conclusions

The UK museums sector is a popular career for many people and thus entry into paid work is very competitive. Museums are not the only field of work where would-be entrants have to demonstrate a commitment to the sector through further study and unpaid work experience as this is common across the creative industries. However, this research does highlight some areas of concern for the future of the museums workforce. These are particularly the requirement that because of low training budgets and other resource constraints, aspiring museums professionals need to take all the responsibility, particularly financial, for their own training and skills development. As Lisa commented, "You have to be more creative and create your own career path and decide what skills you need, find out about these skills and take responsibility for your own development." This will only serve to perpetuate the lack of diversity within the museums workforce, which is currently such a cause for concern.

It seems ironic that staff development and training in the museums is so limited, given the sector sees one of its primary roles as the provision of education. In addition, there seems to be little agreement between museums as to what qualifications and experience are required for different posts, which means that aspiring museum workers may spend considerable time gaining skills, which may not be needed. A clearer career structure and career path would help would-be museums professionals plan better and perhaps university programmes to prepare them better

for their chosen specialism. No doubt the increasing complexity of museum work contributes to disagreement.

The museums profession has not been unable to plan its workforce needs adequately. This could be because government policy and therefore funding priorities change faster than university programmes can change. However, there is no lead from the Museums Association or the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council on what areas of work are currently most prolific, such as education work, where the manager respondents reported a shortage of suitable candidates, and how applicants can prepare themselves for work in these areas. The volunteers in this study were very proactive and used their volunteering and study to build skill and experience portfolio. One volunteers suggested that the Museums Association provided accreditation for such a portfolio, similar to their associateship scheme, based on continuous professional development. The associateship also provides the participant with a mentor, a key factor in a worthwhile internship. Another route may be to set out guidelines for key skills or competencies, which any period of unpaid work experience should cover, as recommended by the AAM. An advantage of this approach for volunteers would be that they could use their experience to gain employment in other sectors, if unable to find museum work.

While the role of museum volunteers is ambiguous for managers, work experience volunteers are engaged in a work-like rather than leisure activity. Their motivations for volunteering are to gain paid employment, but there is some evidence that their experience of volunteering may encourage them to continue to volunteer for other reasons. Previous studies have focused on the much larger numbers of leisure volunteers and largely ignored work experience seekers. These work experience volunteers have very different motives from leisure seekers and require different forms of support. This paper has sought to redress this imbalance and open up the debate on career entry in the museums sector.

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