

Section 6



The changing social roles of museums, with their increased emphasis on visitor and learner-centred approaches, has tremendous training implications for museum professional staff. Public policies concerned with widening participation, combating social exclusion, improving intercultural understanding and promoting cultural rights means that museum professionals have to become as knowledgeable about the wider world and their potential audiences as they are about their objects and exhibitions. They need a heightened awareness of the social and political context in which these policies originate and have significance. They also need to understand the significance of relating exhibition content and interpretation to the existing knowledge and background of prospective audiences, and to realise that most audience members will not have a specialist or academic knowledge of the subject

Although experience and systems differ widely across Europe, there is a good deal of shared understanding and consensus about the four areas in which competence is required when it comes to project planning and

educational work: preparation, design and planning, delivery, and evaluation.

Preparation

- Shaping ideas
- Analysing context – in relation to audience, subject matter and institution
- Doing background research – in relation to collections, audience and learning styles
- Networking and partnership development
- Planning exhibitions and events
- Identifying training needs
- Securing appropriate staff development opportunities.

Design and planning

- Organisational skills: designing appropriate events, project management, financial planning, identifying and contacting potential audiences, and scheduling.

- Educational skills: Developing learning aims and objectives, identifying learning approaches, creating learning activities and producing teaching and learning materials.

Delivery

- Staging and presenting events
- Conducting the related educational activities.

Evaluation

- Monitoring and reviewing activities and events, both during and at the end of their existence.
- Measuring learning outcomes against set targets
- Researching partner and user satisfaction.

More specifically, museum educators involved in the informal provision of lifelong learning in museums need to be able to do a variety of different tasks. They must be able to:

- Devise and plan innovative educational programmes and activities that

recognise the diverse needs of new and different audiences

- Work in partnership with audience and learner groups and/or their representatives in the planning, delivery and evaluation of activities
- Identify current and potential audiences and learners in ways that show understanding of their diverse needs
- Provide opportunities for existing audiences or learners to explore ideas and develop understanding relevant to their own needs and interests
- Provide opportunities for new and different audiences to represent and develop their specific cultural concerns
- Commission and produce educational and resource materials to meet the needs of diverse audiences
- Create learning environments that are accessible and user-friendly
- Evaluate the impact of learning activities on audiences or learners

- Devise, develop and evaluate the education and learning strategy of their organisation

- Contribute to, and help to shape, the interpretative strategy of their organisation.

The emerging training needs for museum and gallery educators are:

- Having a working knowledge of adult education theories and approaches
- Gaining insight into the social and political factors which shape and constrain the experiences of learners
- Developing programmes which help to promote creative thinking skills
- Developing programmes for self-directed learning
- Communicating with adult audiences using innovative approaches and techniques
- Documenting projects and activities effectively, for networking and dissemination purposes and as part of reflective evaluation

- Evaluating the impact of learning on adults participating in museum activities

- Building networks with external partners, audiences, and peers, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally

- Managing change.

Consequently the training programmes devised for staff development purposes should equip museum educators to:

Focus on learners: Innovations concerned with outreach, access and activity should start and proceed in relation to the needs and to the material and cultural circumstances of learners, rather than the needs and requirements of institutions. Outreach, contact outside of the museum or gallery, needs to be taken seriously as the first and most important point of contact with non-traditional learners.

Focus on the activity: How does the knowledge of the art or collections connect to the lived experience of learners? Dialogue and interactive teaching methods – concerned with developing creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking and tolerant and

reflective attitudes– are much more likely to enhance learning than didactic transmission. Information-giving should respond to participants with different amounts of prior knowledge. Some of the conventions and rituals of museum and gallery settings may need to be modified and diversified in order to welcome new participants.

Focus on partnership: Recognise that widening participation to include non-traditional audiences is common to the concerns of both learning and culture. Working in partnership with educational providers, as well as with the communities and associations that represent the interests of learners, is the best way to respond positively to learners' needs and interests. Working in partnership should include the development of shared staff training and the development of opportunities across institutional boundaries.

Focus on equal opportunities and empowerment: Equal opportunities and respect for diversity and difference should be at the centre of the museum's work. Regular consultation, dialogue and collaboration should take place with the representatives of excluded groups.

Focus on research and development: Training support for museum educators should aim to ensure that staff are as knowledgeable and rigorous about participants as they are about their exhibits and collections.

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