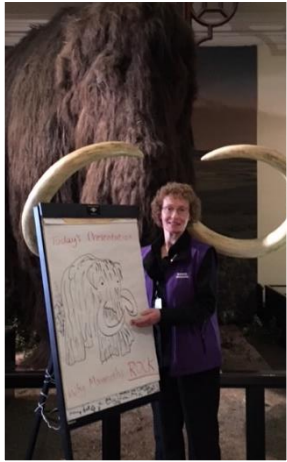


KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE: A VALUABLE ECONOMY



2010 - 2017

Case studies from the British Museum's Knowledge Exchange programme

Project information

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Case studies from the British Museum's Knowledge Exchange programme (2010 – 2017)

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IMAGES

FRONT COVER (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) AND IN CASE STUDY PAGES:

Harvinder Bahra (by kind permission of the British Museum), Paul Taylor, Wendy May, Rachel Davies, Julie Brown (by kind permission of case study participants)

INTRODUCTION:

Gold Aureus coin of Carausius, a Roman emperor who ruled Britain and parts of Gaul. Minted in London, AD 286 – 293. Found as part of the Ashbourne Hoard in Derbyshire in 2007 (by kind permission of the British Museum).

Introduction

THE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

The British Museum Knowledge Exchange programme has been running since 2010. An important part of The British Museum's National Programmes portfolio, over eight years the Knowledge Exchange programme has facilitated 96 knowledge sharing placements between British Museum staff and staff at 40 partner organisations around the UK. These placements are reciprocal in nature, providing an opportunity for one member of staff at each partner organisation to spend five days at The British Museum and, in return, for each partner organisation to host a British Museum member of staff for five days. The programme has been funded by the Vivmar Foundation throughout.

This report comprises case studies from five participants from the Knowledge Exchange programme, drawn from across the programme's duration. It accompanies an evaluation report into the impact of the programme for participants. The evaluation report and case studies were commissioned by The British Museum to assess the impact of the Knowledge Exchange programme on individual participants, as well as to make recommendations for further stages of evaluation to assess the organisational and sectoral impacts of the programme. These case studies provide in-depth examples of the impacts of the Knowledge Exchange programme for participants and so draw out key themes from the overall evaluation, as well as providing greater depth of understanding into the factors that enable individuals to make the most out of their placement experience.

THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Knowledge is the most extraordinary of human currencies. Like cash, we can use knowledge to help us to obtain a wide range of different outcomes,

both tangible and intangible. However, unlike coins and notes, when we share our knowledge with others, we do not relinquish it ourselves. What's more, in sharing our own knowledge, we invite reciprocal exchange, so can often find ourselves the richer as a result of our generosity.

Within the heritage and cultural sector, knowledge is a significant driver of organisational value. The people who comprise organisations hold within and between them a wealth of knowledge – from in-depth understanding of collections, to expertise in interpretation, audiences, organisational systems and much more. In turn, this knowledge can generate both financial and non-financial benefits for organisations themselves, as individuals put their knowledge into practice in their working lives.

The Knowledge Exchange Programme is designed to support UK museums and cultural organisations by building relationships, sharing expertise and investing in individuals in a way that aims to support their current job role, and allow them to explore areas of interest and professional development that may relate to their future aspirations within the sector as well. Participants are encouraged to put the learning and ideas from their exchange to use after they return to work, but the National Programmes team acknowledges that longer term benefits may come to fruition months or years after the exchange. Over the longer-term the programme may also benefit organisations beyond partner organisations, as participants move into new roles and workplaces.

These case studies help to cast light on the benefits participants can experience as a result of the programme, both immediately and in the longer-term.



Wendy May

MUSEUM ASSISTANT

Current organisation: Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service	Organisation at time of placement: Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service
Placement: British Museum	Date of placement: 2015

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

“They’ll never choose me!” was Wendy May’s thought as she submitted her Knowledge Exchange application. Colchester and Ipswich Museum was in the midst of master planning when the opportunity arose for the placement. Wendy, a Museum Assistant of many years, was alert to the front of house implications for the upscaling of the museum offer and keen to explore these at the British Museum.

WHAT HAPPENED ON PLACEMENT?

A wide range of contacts was made with British Museum departments and different learning methods were deployed: walkabouts with key staff; observation of groups using the museum; meetings with staff. Wendy collected a suitcase full of leaflets, template documents, education workshop handouts and samples. Significantly, she wrote a report for each day of her placement, on everything from Safeguarding to Pigeon Management (spoiler alert, it doesn’t end well for the pigeon), and citing 19 other organisations as reference sources. She indexed it by subject, ready for sharing.

WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT?

Wendy applied the principles of Knowledge Exchange almost as soon as she got back to work sharing her report widely; a copy was placed in the

staffroom for all to read; she made a presentation to front and back-of-house colleagues. She handed British Museum marketing leaflets to curators, gave the Education team the children’s pre-history book she’d purchased with



her staff discount in the British Museum shop. She passed on email contact details to her Visitor Services colleagues so that they could follow up directly with British Museum staff (which they did). Three years down the line, Wendy has contributed to the ongoing review of education workshops, and the impact of her sharing is discernible in the family backpacks now in use in the Mankind Gallery and in the new Floor Plans which highlight key objects.

WHAT MADE IT HAPPEN?

Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service shared their redevelopment plans with *all* staff to the extent that Wendy could see how the Knowledge Exchange programme could contribute, through her, to that redevelopment. They then fully supported Wendy’s application, including bearing the cost of covering her hours. The British Museum staff were willing to be led by Wendy on her self-directed learning journey and were flexible in accommodating suggestions which emerged mid-placement. She had privileged access to areas which are normally strictly off limits, such as the security control room. The driving factor however is Wendy’s own passion for sharing and her awareness that everything she experienced at the British Museum would be relevant for a department or colleague in her own museum service.

#KEYWORDS

- Sharing, sharing, sharing!
- Flexibility
- Self-direction

Rachel Davies

DEPUTY DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS

Current organisation: Ashmolean Museum	Organisation at time of placement: Compton Verney
Placement: British Museum	Date of placement: 2017 (3 days in August and December)

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

With 15 years' experience of operations at Compton Verney, Rachel recognised that at the British Museum she would have the opportunity to discuss mutual challenges with a dispassionate but knowledgeable outsider, thereby refreshing her own perspective and giving her an opportunity to re-examine the status quo. By the time her programme started in August, Rachel had been appointed to a similar role at the Ashmolean Museum, which was in the early stages of investigating 7 day opening and by the autumn of the year, she was in her new post.

WHAT HAPPENED ON PLACEMENT?

Initially Rachel was put in contact with her opposite number at the British Museum and with those who headed up departments which reflected her responsibilities. As well as sharing experiences with the British Museum's staff and following up on contacts they suggested in other museums, she was also introduced over lunch to another Knowledge Exchange participant, Katrina Thomson, a Collections Consultancy Manager at the National Trust. This direct, personal introduction proved to be pivotal. Katrina was able to share the National Trust's experience of comparable changes to their operation and to explain their process for bringing both staff and volunteers on board.

WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT?

Her new knowledge of how the National Trust has successfully approached operational change demystified the process for Rachel and confirmed her instinctive approach. Seeing what other "nice, normal people" had achieved, she could see herself doing likewise, and without the need to become superwoman!



She and six Ashmolean department heads have visited one of the Trust's properties to listen to their experience, and the lessons the Trust learned from their roll out of operational change. Rachel has subsequently been "retro-fitting" some of those ideas into the Ashmolean's process and the proposed changes are being fully consulted on with staff.

WHAT MADE IT HAPPEN?

In this case it was the foresight of connecting two participants to share directly their non-British Museum experiences that has made the difference. Katrina's extensive knowledge of operational matters was, of course, also key but given that Rachel's original placement happened in August and Katrina's started in December, it was actually the wisdom of the Knowledge Exchange programme's coordinator, Georgia Mallin, the flexibility of the programme, the devolved nature of decision-making and her preparedness to think outside the box that made these outcomes possible.

#KEYWORDS

Participant-to-participant learning
Retro-fitting ideas
Operations and process
Flexibility
Thinking outside the box

Paul Taylor

HEAD OF COLLECTIONS

Current organisation: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust	Organisation at time of placement: Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry
Placement: British Museum	Date of placement: 2011

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

When Paul applied for his placement at the British Museum, The Herbert Art Gallery was applying for Major Partner Museum funding from the Arts Council but anticipating the possibility of being unsuccessful. Digital access to collections was his subject of choice for the Knowledge Exchange programme; work which in fact came to a halt when Renaissance in the Regions funding ended and the Herbert was unsuccessful in its Arts Council bid. In hindsight Paul's final year at the Herbert was one of transition, in the midst of which his placement happened.

WHAT HAPPENED ON PLACEMENT?

Time away from his normal job gave Paul the opportunity to think about where his role was going. The week's placement was long enough to switch off from the Herbert. Whilst the breadth of exposure at the British Museum – databases, collection on line, sharing data more widely, website publishing, ebooks, the curatorial connection with digital output and the Samsung Digital Discovery Centre – gave him many ideas about the future of digital collections, it also kick-started a process of realising that this was not the career path he most wanted to take.

WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT?

By January 2012 Paul's thoughts about his future had crystallised. The placement had shown him the possibility of



digital collections but his heart, and his future, lay with *hands on* collections management. Within two months he became Collections Manager at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, citing his Knowledge Exchange experience during his interview to evidence the clarity of his commitment to that role. In January 2015, he became Head of Collections and when his line manager took maternity leave in 2017, Paul was clear that a year as Acting Director of Cultural Engagement would suit him and his burgeoning skills well. His commitment to CPD is also clear. In his own words, "the Knowledge Exchange programme kick-started me thinking about me", and he hasn't stopped thinking since. This raised awareness of his responsibility to manage his own CPD has since resulted in him applying successfully for the AIM Leaders course and also taking on his first trustee position.

WHAT MADE IT HAPPEN?

As Paul approached his career cross roads in 2011, the Knowledge Exchange programme reaffirmed that the openness of the museums sector was what made it the place he wanted to be. The richness and depth of the digital collections exposure at the British Museum served to highlight the different path that this could lead him down. The time to reflect enabled a transformative process.

#KEYWORDS

Exposure
Reflection
Career crossroads
CPD
Responsibility

Harvinder Bahra

HEAD OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TEAM

Current organisation: The British Museum	Organisation at time of placement: The British Museum
Placement: Leeds Museums and Galleries	Date of placement: 2017

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

Harvinder had been part of the British Museum’s Community Partnerships team for 8 years and was working as Community Partnerships Manager for Special Exhibitions at the time of her placement. Working in a national museum, and in an area which challenges traditional practice and notions of fixed communities, she was especially keen to seek out others’ experiences and to establish both the commonality and diversity of their professional experiences across the wellbeing, health and social prescribing arenas.

WHAT HAPPENED ON PLACEMENT?

During her three days in Leeds, Harvinder spent time with the Community Team at Leeds Museums and visited seven of their nine sites. More significant than the sites however were their discussions, which covered the nature of community engagement work in relation to and in contrast to other forms of museum work; the nature of the communities it serves; the networks and agencies through which they often deliver; tensions in stakeholder agendas and the sustainability of their work. In particular, social prescribing was discussed, as University College London had just completed a three-year research project in which the British Museum had been a partner.

WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT?

In a short time Harvinder really developed her knowledge of what goes on in a wide variety of museum settings - rural,



urban, industrial, artistic – as well as with a breadth of different communities. Her learning from Leeds allows her to demonstrate that she’s “not living in a bubble” at the British Museum. As well as this largely anticipated learning, Harvinder identified an unexpected though welcome consequence, which is a growth in her self-confidence. She is now able to speak more authoritatively and comfortably at conferences and in meetings about national trends and impacts, rather than just localised effects. Shortly after her placement she was promoted internally. In her new role as head of the department, her confidence will extend her reach in advocating nationally for the cutting edge work of community engagement.

WHAT MADE IT HAPPEN?

Solidarity and the realisation that the challenges she faces are faced by others too has fed Harvinder’s self-belief. Undoubtedly the “no holds barred” sharing by colleagues in Leeds really enabled this. In the past Harvinder has known hostility towards the British Museum as a standards setter. Her experience in Leeds has broadened the basis of her credibility which has also contributed to her confidence. Underpinning and enabling all this learning and development is Harvinder’s desire to relate to others’ experiences rather than advise or endorse them, and her determination to listen in order to learn.

KEYWORDS

Sharing
Partnership
Parity
Ability to relate
Networks

Julie Brown

COLLECTIONS CURATOR

Current organisation: The New Art Gallery, Walsall	Organisation at time of placement: The New Art Gallery, Walsall
Placement: The British Museum	Date of placement: 2014/15

WHAT WAS THE CONTEXT?

Passionate about widening access to collections, Julie embarked on her placement at the British Museum in 2015 with Epstein and radicalism in mind; the New Art Gallery Walsall was preparing to celebrate the centenary of the destruction of the artist's most radical piece, The Rock Drill. Keen to cement links with the British Museum (she was already borrowing four Epstein sculptures for the exhibition), she also identified the British Museum's provision for those with impaired vision as a priority for her organisation's development.

WHAT HAPPENED ON PLACEMENT?

Julie was invited to road test the British Museum's new large print tour and Touch Tour and to give feedback on its use in the galleries, shadow an arts group for older people and trial Rules for a Playful Museum which was being developed in conjunction with the Manchester Museum. She met with staff from three different departments and they in turn made introductions for her to national organisations for visual impairment as well as providing contact details for support networks in her region.

WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT?

Julie has gone on to work directly with those organisations including VocalEyes; to become a Dementia and Autism Champion; and to promote

the Gallery's work directly to organisations for those with visual impairment.

Through the initial Playful connection with Manchester Museum, Julie was inspired to choose the Museum's director as her AMA mentor, because of the Museum's sector-leading reputation. Inspired by the work of the British Museum's Community Partnerships team with older people, for her AMA project she developed the Scenes of Walsall inter-generational project and reoriented gallery space to be family friendly. Her journey comes full circle in 2019 when she will work with VocalEyes and Art UK on a sculpture workshop for the visually impaired to coincide with the Gallery's Rodin spotlight tour from the British Museum.



WHAT MADE IT HAPPEN?

In her words, Julie's placement "kick-started my awareness". She identifies the introduction by a British Museum staff member to the most senior person in another organisation as being the catalyst for what followed. The personal introduction at the highest level acted as a stamp of approval and an endorsement of her credibility. This endorsement along with her experience of being treated as an equal led to increased confidence, both in terms of her belief that she was heading in the right direction and her own sense of agency ("I had *enough* knowledge despite being a generalist"). It also contributed to her willingness to approach high level players herself. What emerged was a long-term agenda for change, and the inspiration and impetus to start making it happen.

#KEYWORDS

- Catalyst
- Confidence
- Personal introductions
- Endorsement
- Reciprocity
- Active learning