

Careers in Heritage



How to kick start your career in the heritage sector

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What is the heritage sector?

Very broadly, the heritage sector covers roles in museums, working with archives, rare book collections, conservation, education, events, archaeology, historic buildings... The list could go on. Within each of these areas, there are a number of different roles and specialisms, many of which require different training, skills and experience. Working in this sector can offer a rewarding and fascinating career.

National and local government bodies, professional associations and a broad range of specialist service providers and freelancers all support the extensive heritage sector.

While average salary levels can be lower for heritage jobs compared with other sectors, competition for roles is often fierce in an increasingly popular field. These two factors combined mean that to build a successful career in the heritage sector, you will need a genuine love of what you do.

Enthusiasm for preserving history and heritage will be a key element, but will not necessarily be enough to secure you the job. Most roles will require you to be educated to at least degree level, but you will need a large amount of relevant work experience too. Gaining knowledge of the sector through volunteering, work shadowing and/or via an internship is often the best way to give your CV the best chance of being noticed by potential employers.

Because the heritage sector covers such a range of careers, there are a wide diversity of places to look for opportunities. Current records suggest there are over 2,500 museums, over 4000 public libraries and 950 academic libraries in the UK. In 2009 there were 122 national, 654 local, 328 university, 1224 special and 61 business archive collections listed in the UK, so there is no shortage of places to work!

What qualifications do you need?

The majority of jobs in heritage require higher education qualifications. In theory, the subject you study is less important than the fact you have demonstrated a high level of academic commitment and ability. An undergraduate level degree is usually required, while a master's degree or doctorate is not. However, the more specialised the work you would like to pursue is, the more likely a specialised qualification is beneficial in the long term. University courses can offer the chance to try out different aspects of your chosen sector, perhaps taking part in both theoretical and hands-on modules.

Instead of (or as well as) academic qualifications, you can also achieve work-based qualifications. While working in a heritage or museum role, even a part-time or seasonal one, you can work towards the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in visitor services, which opens up your career horizons in museums and galleries.

Unlike other sectors, there's not an annual graduate recruitment cycle for cultural work, and only a few graduate schemes.

Further study

Many people choose further study before embarking on their career, but this may not be the best route as experience can often outweigh a qualification. There are many within the sector stating that they're keen to give opportunities to those who haven't had a chance to complete a course of further study, so it's certainly not right for everyone.

When you're trying to decide whether or not further study is right for you, it may help to consider the following:

- Gain some experience (informal work experience, volunteering, internships or basic paid work) within the sector first, it might not be all that you're expecting!
- Clarify your career ambitions – do you need further study for your career path? It's not unusual to work for a couple of years while you get to know the sector to prevent a misplaced investment. Some qualifications can be gained on the job.
- Research what courses are commonly sought in job listings, and ask those currently doing the role which they specifically might recommend.
- Decide which course suits you: read about the experience of participants as well as gathering information on typical destinations upon completion.

What experience do you need?

Do not underestimate the value of practical workplace experience in this sector. Although academic qualifications are often necessary, experience can be what helps give you the edge over the competition. Unfortunately, the heritage sector is notorious for wanting practical experience from applicants, but often this will be unpaid. Heritage institutions are aware of this and will put a lot of time and effort in to supporting volunteers and the experience you can gain will be invaluable.

Aim to volunteer and get involved both whilst at University and during vacations to ensure that your enthusiasm is backed by broad experience and expertise. There are many things you can do to volunteer: sell tickets; organise publicity; work with customers; book outside performers; negotiate sponsorship; organise venues and transport; manage money and records. All of these will demonstrate your commitment and give you the ability to show potential employers proof of your relevant skills.

Volunteering

Some places will actively recruit volunteers but most will rely on you getting in touch with them. Large museums and libraries should have a section on their website about volunteering and how to apply for volunteer roles, but because of this they might also be oversubscribed, so it can be worth approaching smaller places too.

National and regional institutions might offer a great volunteering programme, but smaller organisations might offer a broader range of experience. Spend time researching the organisation, find out what would be best for you and suggest specified areas you want to volunteer in. Bear in mind that many places will have rather long waiting lists, so the sooner you get in touch, the better.

Remember that it's not the amount of experience you gain through volunteering but what you make of it that will count in your favour when looking to progress your career in museums or galleries.

Internships and Traineeships

Where formal internships and traineeships are offered, they are likely to be listed alongside jobs and other opportunities. Look at the 'get involved' or 'about us' pages of an organisation's website to look for internships; most places will now advertise opportunities on their social media too. Ideally internships should be paid, if they're not, make sure you check carefully what is being offered and what the role will involve require before applying.

Museums Galleries Scotland offer traineeships, courses, workshops and events for anyone looking to get in to the sector: <https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/skills-and-events/>

The ICON Internship programme provides internships for those interested in conservation: <https://icon.org.uk/what-is-conservation/internships>

See the list in the resources section about organisations to contact about volunteering and other possible internships and traineeship providers.

Getting a job

After you have done all the hard work of gaining experience and any qualifications, and fully worked out what sort of role you would like to go into, it is time to find that perfect job.

Adverts for heritage jobs will be on all the usual jobsites, but websites like [Museum Jobs](#) are worth checking for more specialised opportunities. Think about looking at university websites for academic roles and bigger employers like [English Heritage](#) and the [National Trust](#) as they will have opportunities coming up regularly.

Roles will be advertised based on need from the organisation: seasonal events, new funding, new projects or roles becoming vacant. That means that you might be working on applications over a long period of time – don't give up though, there are lots of things you can do in the meantime.

Temporary and seasonal work

Temporary jobs (which can be less sought after) are often an initial step that enable aspiring arts professionals to demonstrate their ability, network with others and continue to learn and develop. They are often found in organisations in receipt of short-term funding, or seasonal events such as major cultural festivals.

There are dozens of events and festivals (literary; arts; music; theatre) where you might be able to secure paid work and/or free entry if volunteering:

- Look for box-office or front-of-house roles in local arts venues – research on the individual festival website, or use sites that provide information on multiple festivals, e.g. [Festaff](#)
- Consider a speculative approach. For example, if you have IT (or design/ marketing/ translation etc.) skills, and could improve a local arts organisation's work, get in touch to suggest a project you could do.

Think laterally

Skills gained from other industries could provide you with some transferable experience, particularly when coupled with relevant volunteering. You could work for an organisation that 'serves' the arts and heritage sector. There are specialist firms that work mainly or only with this field, including architects, manufacturers, events companies, marketers, consultancies, printers, shippers, packagers, conservators, insurers, trainers, recruiters and many more.

Stay in touch and network

It is worthwhile joining professional associations as a student member to access networking events, keep up with sector news and add any professionals in the sector you've worked with on LinkedIn. Make the effort to keep in touch with your contacts and let them know when you are job seeking, and keep volunteering!

[The University of Edinburgh Arts and Heritage Society](#) is a student run group that advertises volunteering opportunities in the arts and heritage sector as well as running a programme of events, including an annual careers fair. It is worth checking out their activities and getting in touch about the opportunities they can offer – and this might be your first network!

[Jiscmail](#) provides e-mail discussion lists for the UK education and research communities. There are a number of relevant lists you can join depending on your area of interest. Try searching for “archives” or “conservation” to find the list for you!

Types of Job

The heritage sector incorporates such a wide range of roles that it is not possible to cover them all! The focus here is on the types of jobs that staff have in the Library and University Collections department as these are the ones we know best.

For details on other career options within the heritage sector, have a look at the list available on the [Creative and Cultural Skills website](#).

Archivist

If you have an interest in history and in preserving records for posterity, a career as an archivist may be for you. Archivists acquire, manage and maintain documents and other materials that have historical importance. Archives can include books, papers, maps, plans, photographs and films. A large part of the job involves making information accessible to users.

Find out more about what an [archivist](#) does.

To become an archivist you will need a first degree, followed by a postgraduate qualification accredited by the Archives and Records Association (ARA). The following Universities all offer accredited courses: University of Aberystwyth, Maynooth University, University College Dublin, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow, University of Liverpool and University College London.

For archive jobs, join the Archives-NRA list and Records Management UK list.

Conservator

Museums, libraries and galleries employ conservators to care for their collections. This is often achieved by applying scientific methods to preserve and restore items. Work can involve a variety of preventive (i.e. monitoring and controlling the environment in which collections are stored or displayed to prevent deterioration) and interventive (i.e. when actions are carried out to address the physical and chemical effects of damage to the collections) treatments.

There are a few undergraduate degrees in conservation, but most people complete an undergraduate degree in a different subject and then study a Masters course in conservation. There are a few Masters courses taught around the UK that specialise in different types of conservation, with more than 30 universities offering courses. Find out about what they offer on the [Institute of Conservation's \(ICON\) website](#).

Conservators can sometimes be employed on short-term contracts or as self-employed freelancers. They tend to train and specialise in one class of object, e.g. paintings, and work closely with curators and other collection staff.

You can find out more about how to become a [conservator](#), and [how to get into museum conservation](#).

Museum Curator

Curators acquire, research, display and explain/write about objects in their care, and are viewed as the academic experts for a collection. They usually have an academic background in a relevant field, and many advertisements for curators require postgraduate study. There are often Assistant Curators or Researchers in support roles at larger organisations.

In this job you'll be responsible for managing collections and works of art, dealing with the acquisition, care and display of items, and inform and educate the public. You may also deal with fundraising, marketing, and public relations.

Jobs are open to graduates from a range of backgrounds, with a good honours degree the minimum academic requirement. A postgraduate qualification is often necessary.

Find out more about the responsibilities of a [museum or gallery curator](#).

Exhibitions Officer

Working as an exhibitions officer is very varied. Overall, they are responsible for planning, organising, developing, marketing, administering, producing, sourcing and maintaining permanent or travelling exhibitions for museums and galleries.

The work is open to all graduates with a good undergraduate qualification, but you may be at an advantage if you have a relevant degree such as archaeology, archive and museum studies, art conservation, history or education. For Exhibition Officer roles in a museum, it is becoming increasingly necessary to have a Museum Studies degree. These are currently offered by: University of Glasgow, University of Durham, University of Aberdeen, University of St Andrews, University of Leicester, Newcastle University, University of York – to name a few of the most popular.

Work experience for this role is essential. Practical skills in setting up exhibitions and excellent organisational, time and project management skills are key. You'll also need a genuine interest in artefacts, art or other cultural material.

Read about the skills and responsibilities of a [museum/gallery exhibition officer](#).

Museum Collections Manager

Collections Managers are responsible for the management of objects under an institution's care, including their cataloguing, conservation, safety, acquisition and removal, storage and digital recording. In some larger institutions a Collections Manager might be supported by a 'Collections Assistant' role. A similar role, known as a Registrar, is also responsible for the

objects, particularly their transportation to other museums/galleries for loan or auctions. This may entail packing, arranging insurance and even travelling with the objects to ensure safe passage and suitable display.

Read about the day to day experiences of a [museum collections manager](#).

Museum Education Officer

Education/Outreach Officers link arts organisations with the public. Their work includes the preparation and delivery of programmes, events and resources for schools and other visitors. Many will have a background in education or community work and education roles often specify a preference for applicants with qualified teacher status (QTS), or a relevant academic specialism.

You'll aim to deliver high quality programmes of learning and participation and ensure that the collections in a museum act as a learning resource for all ages. You'll need at least an undergraduate degree to secure a job. Subjects such as education, community education, history, museum studies, cultural studies and archaeology may give you an advantage.

Where you hope to work may have an influence on your degree, for example, a qualification in fine art or visual art may be useful for the V&A Museum, or a science and technology degree for the Science Museum.

Find out what skills you'll need to become a [museum education officer](#).

Photographer and Digital Reformatting and Production Managers

Photographers or Digital Managers are usually only employed as full time staff in large institutions (other smaller bodies would hire-in this skill when needed). They document exhibitions and collections to directly support online access and digital preservation. Their skillset can be comprised of specialist knowledge in imaging, audio and video production, scanning, digital restoration, special collections handling, quality assurance, workflow management, project management, metadata management, and information technology. They are typically supported by additional Project Managers, Information Managers, Librarians and Archivists who work to record and facilitate use of materials by the institution's users or visitors.

Read about the skills required for becoming a [photographer](#).

Special Collections / Rare Books Librarian

Within librarianship there are a number of areas of specialism; some of which are mainly in the public sector libraries, and others within academic libraries. Our library staff mostly specialise in one of the following areas. Special Collections Librarians generally work with a variety of original primary source materials, including rare books, manuscripts, archives, and photographs that require specialised storage. They often have multiple job responsibilities

including among others collection development, reference, cataloguing, preservation, instruction, and outreach.

Rare Book Librarians typically work with published materials from both the hand-press and machine-press periods. Although rare books are not easy to define, the criteria used to identify them is usually based on age, financial value, number of copies extant, and provenance.

Academic Liaison Librarians sometimes have dual/joint roles at their institutions. Liaison librarians are usually assigned to a department on campus based on their educational background or experience. They are expected to serve as a communication bridge between the library system and their department and vice versa in order to provide support for teaching, learning, and research. There are many roles for librarian liaisons in providing instruction sessions, research support, and collection development for their departments.

To become a librarian in any of these areas, first you will need a CILIP-accredited postgraduate qualification but there are also vocational qualifications available. Find out more on the [CILIP website](#), and the [IFLA website](#).

Find out about the skills and experience you'd need for these roles within the [public](#) and [academic](#) sectors.

Customer Services and Front of House Staff

User Services and Front of House teams are all essentially customer service teams who provide high quality access to collections and facilities through interacting with the public (or 'users') face-to-face, online (email, social media) or by phone. These posts do not always require specific knowledge of the heritage area in which they are located, but require enthusiasm for engaging the public with the museum / library / archive. These posts do require strong customer service, communication and interpersonal skills, rather than formal qualifications. The day-to-day work will vary between locations and often includes duties such as retail / cash handling, facilities support, events work, book / archive fetching and shelving, exhibition installation support and customer engagement (e.g. surveys). Within libraries there is significant overlap with IT support and certificates such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) are often cited in job adverts.

Managerial roles for these services require strong experience in people management, budgeting and often a relevant postgraduate degree or professional certification (e.g. Museum Studies, Library & Information Science, Archives & Records Management). Due to the varied nature of these roles there often isn't a formal career path or qualification to follow. Details for information officer type roles can be found [here](#).

Other Heritage Sector Roles (that you may not have considered)

Libraries, museums, galleries and heritage sites also employ staff to work in a variety of departments. Whilst some of these areas might not be exactly what you're looking for, they

may offer you the opportunity to learn different skills that will be applicable in other ways in your career.

Business Development / Commercial Manager

Income generation has become increasingly important to the heritage sector in recent years, as the government reduces their funding and many trusts and foundations want to see heritage organisations taking greater responsibility for sustainability and future proofing the sector.

This has created a development in opportunities for those with business qualifications and entrepreneurial skills and experience to find employment in the sector.

In the main, these roles are focused on establishing or maintaining a variety of earned income streams such as venue hire, retail, catering, events, filming and photography, e-commerce, for example. To succeed in a business development role you need to be good at spotting commercial opportunities, have a persuasive way in order to 'sell' a new idea and look ahead at emerging trends, in addition to being good at budgeting and aiming for high profits and few losses.

Most large heritage organisations will have business or commercial departments but increasingly more rural or smaller heritage organisations are creating collectives and engaging the support of business or enterprise managers.

A good source for looking at jobs like this would be the Association of Scottish Visitor Attraction <https://www.asva.co.uk/jobs> and the Association of Cultural Enterprises <https://culturalenterprises.org.uk/job-board>

Marketing / PR and communications

Marketing, digital communication and PR areas are responsible for being the 'voice of the brand', raising the profile of the collections, exhibitions and heritage organisations, and reaching the organisation's target markets. PR professionals do this through working with the media, marketing professionals through promotional materials, messaging and advertising, and digital by using digital media.

The responsibilities and remit of individuals in these roles will depend on the size of the organisation and the importance they place on marketing. It could encompass all areas or concentrate on one specialism.

As these career paths are not specific to museums, they don't always follow the traditional routes and communications professionals often come into the sector from other industries. Likewise, although many follow the higher education route before embarking on their career, sometimes it is sufficient to simply have experience and an in-depth knowledge of the sector to progress.

You'll usually enter work at an officer, assistant or executive level, progressing up to a manager role, and in larger organisations can progress to senior management and strategic

positions. When in post, many professionals choose to gain further professional qualifications, often through the [Chartered Institute of Marketing \(CIM\)](#) or [Chartered Institute of Public Relations \(CIPR\)](#).

Read about the responsibilities of a [Marketing Executive](#) and a [Digital Marketer](#).

Visitor Operations / Experience Manager

Staff engaged in visitor operations or as an experience manager will have overall responsibility for the historic site or venue; with a mix of business and heritage experience required.

You need to be highly organised and a good communicator to succeed in this area of the heritage sector. You would have responsibility for the planning, development and implementation of operations and will provide effective leadership to the Visitor Assistant teams and often the Education and Events Assistants too. These areas set the standard for the visitor experience and will play an instrumental role in maintaining and developing an outstanding level of customer service, taking responsibility for all areas of daily visitor operations.

You may also have responsibility for overseeing catering contractors, the security systems, and legislation around large public venues. This role requires an outgoing personality with a 'can do' attitude.

Qualifications and experience relating to a job like this tend to come from Hospitality, Tourism or Event Management courses. A good source for looking at jobs like this in Scotland is the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions - <https://www.asva.co.uk/jobs>

Health and Wellbeing

The positive connection of arts, culture and heritage on our health and wellbeing has a growing wealth of evidence that is now informing how this sector connects and works with healthcare and health policy. The broad cultural sector is quickly evolving to recognise the opportunities for the creation of strategic work that explores and promotes arts and wellbeing and funders are developing criteria in response. Much of the sector have already been exploring our wellbeing through engagement work with schools or specific communities or groups but there is new impetus to explicitly design interventions that have planned outcomes that aim to improve our health and wellbeing. This, in turn, requires new ways of working across the cultural and the healthcare sectors; developing new partnerships, finding a common language and exploring joint funding opportunities.

New roles within the cultural sector are being created that have responsibility to evolve projects and strategies and that recognise where partnerships can develop as well as having an understanding of the worlds of both public health and arts and culture. For the heritage sector it is a fascinating area and roles, so far, have emerged from Learning, Engagement or Outreach.

The emphasis for the arts and cultural sector is on learning and engagement and the importance of having appropriate partnerships allows for safeguarding around specific physical or mental health challenges. Areas that many cultural organisations already work within are events for those living with dementia, out of hours or 'relaxed' visits and events for those with autism, specific interventions for people with either hearing or sight impairments. This area of work needs excellent communication skills, sensitivity to health challenges, an ability to recognise good partners and how to build partnerships and to understand how to design arts and creative intervention within a health environment.

With all of the above, there is a strong expectation that the future will afford new roles in the heritage sector where an understanding of heritage and health sectors and how heritage can support health objectives will be a new key combination of knowledge and experience for evolving jobs.

Other roles that can also give experience in the heritage sector include:

- **Administration** – a role vital to all organisations, and can be a useful entry point, leading to progression to a more specialised role
- **Digital media/technology** – social media officers/managers to run the venues social media accounts and editors, writers, and specialists to manage the museum's website.
- **Finance and fundraising** – accountants, financial managers and fundraising officers.
- **HR and recruitment** – to oversee the workforce, manage recruitment and encourage volunteers.
- **Retail** – sales assistants for gift shops.
- **Volunteer Manager** – responsible for recruitment, training, development and retention of an organisations volunteers.

Real Life Careers

In this section you can hear from staff from Library and University Collections and their chosen career path.

Archivist

Aline: I decided to become an archivist after completing a Master's Degree in Medieval History (Research) at the University of Caen, my hometown. While doing research for my dissertation, I had to spend quite some time working on medieval charters and registers. I enjoyed the detective work, the charm of the old parchment, the connection with people who lived centuries ago... That's why I decided to do a one-year Master's Degree in 'Museum and Archives Sciences', again at the University of Caen. We were taught the theory during the first part of the year, and then had to complete a four-month placement to get some hand-on experience, which I did at Glasgow University Archive Services. This internship was invaluable to get a proper insight into the daily responsibilities and duties of an archivist.

In 2014 I moved to Edinburgh to try and find a job in this field. I got my first opportunity at the Royal College of Nursing Archive, which enabled me to gain experience of medical records, and to get a good reference to apply to a paid internship at the Lothian Health Services Archives. A few months later, when LHSA needed an archivist for a maternity cover working on the very same material, my past experience made me the ideal candidate. I was then in a good position to apply for another archivist job advertised at the University of Edinburgh, this time working with very varied archival collections, not just medical. And finally, after a few years, my contract was made permanent! It definitely was a gradual process, and I would say that you need to be willing to move if needed, but it was really worth it – it is a very interesting and enriching profession.

Louise: I'm currently the Archivist for Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA), NHS Lothian's archive, based here in the Centre for Research Collections. We collect records from hospitals and about healthcare in the Lothian region, and we're the largest health archive in the UK, looking after collections from 1594 right up to the present day. My role involves looking after the day-to-day running of the archive, from helping users to access material, to giving talks about collections, supervising staff and volunteers, and bringing in new donations to help our collections grow and reflect how healthcare is changing.

I am a career-change archivist – the job had always appealed to me, and a move to Edinburgh was the push I needed to re-train. I found out about what the job entailed online, so knew that I'd need a vocational qualification, and to get onto one of these I'd need to have some experience of an archive environment. So I volunteered for a day a week here at LHSA back in 2009 - 2010 (sometimes it feels strange doing the job I do now because of this!) and at the Royal College of Nursing archives, around a part-time job in the voluntary sector. I ended up being accepted onto the MSc in Information Management and Preservation at the University of Glasgow. I was extremely lucky – in the year I applied, the

course had funding for fees and maintenance, and my previous volunteering put me in a strong position to get this scholarship. With this financial help, I was able to continue to volunteer in archives during my studies. I chose the course on account of its emphasis on managing born-digital archives – a skill I knew would be useful for the future.

Post-qualification, I was offered a temporary paid role at the National Records of Scotland where I'd been volunteering at the time. I didn't need to be a qualified archivist for the job, but was able to pick up some valuable skills along the way. After this, I got a short-term contract cataloguing (describing and ordering) a collection created by missionaries held at the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh. My next role was a longer-term contract working on neurosurgery archives here in LHASA. In the middle of that I was seconded into my present role as Archivist when a colleague left back in 2014.

My top tips: It sounds obvious, but make sure you know what an archivist does and the different aspects of the job. Volunteering is a great way to find this out, and you'll need some experience of being in an archive to apply for a professional qualification. Here at LHASA, we host 'taster days', which involve just a day of commitment, and you can find out a little bit about the sector and the sorts of records we look after, with no obligation to take things any further. Careers in archives, museums, galleries and libraries are not interchangeable, so make sure you're aware of the different options open to you too.

Look out for paid experience as well. We know that volunteering is not an option for everyone, for all sorts of reasons, including financial ones. Slowly the sector is beginning to offer more paid training opportunities prior to qualification, from a few weeks to a year. Similarly, look out for funding opportunities for postgraduate vocational qualifications. Make sure you do this in plenty of time, since deadlines for funding may not be the same ones as for applications.

If you can, take a few risks! Early-career roles are often short-term contracts, from a few months to a couple of years. This is far from ideal, but it's the current reality: it's now extremely rare that someone's first role after qualification will be an open-ended / permanent one. Don't expect jobs to be in one place – you may have to move around a bit. But building up this experience is a big step to applying for permanent roles. Also, it's best to be open to looking after all sorts of material: don't dismiss potentially valuable experience because it's not about your main interests, or you won't be ready to get that dream job when it does come along!

Get as much advice from people in the sector as you can. For example, the online magazine from the Archive and Records Association's Section for New Professionals provides down-to-earth advice from archivists and records managers at all stages of their careers:

<https://bit.ly/2b6BjPo>.

Don't under-estimate your existing skills. It's a common misconception that archivists sit on their own in dark rooms surrounded by dusty books and parchment. As an archivist, you'll use skills in customer service, outreach and communication (talking to everyone from children to pensioners), project management, working in a team, research and analysis,

social media... to name a few. So don't forget to highlight these when you're looking for both paid and voluntary roles.

Conservator

Emily: Read about our conservator, Emily's, career in conservation in a blog post on the ICON website: [Karma, Castles and Condoms – my career in conservation](#)

Museum Curator

Jenny: My career has not been planned. It has been a series of 'being in the right place at the right time' events. After finishing my degree and while doing odd jobs as a freelance musician I started doing voluntary work in the musical instrument collection at the Royal College of Music. I applied for and got the Assistant Curator role when the previous incumbent left to become a monk. I then did my masters in Museum and Gallery Management while working (it was a 4-day a week post), with the support of the RCM. The Curator retired and I interviewed for the role as the single internal candidate and was promoted in 2005.

I then did my PhD while working as I wanted to move into a University role in due course. I interviewed for the post of Curator at Edinburgh in 2013, even though I didn't precisely match the criteria – they advertised for a woodwind specialist and I am more of a generalist – but it worked out well as I now look after the entire collection. The role of Curator is not the same between institutions and even changes under foot within an institution, so you have to be flexible and prepared to respond to external pressures. As there are only half a dozen specialist Curators in my field in the UK, I feel privileged to have this role as I know there are many others who would like it!

Malcolm: I was an undergraduate in Scottish History and was fortunate that the Museum of Scotland at NMS was in development when I started looking for work. I started work there as a graphic researcher for the new displays, before moving into a series of curatorial roles, initially as an Assistant Curator then Project Researcher. During this time I also completed a postgraduate certificate in Museum and Gallery Studies at the University of St Andrews. I then worked as Senior Curator at the National Football Museum in England, before becoming Exhibitions Manager at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh and finally curator at the Anatomical Museum.

My tip would be flexible as possible – both in what you want to 'curate' (I started off working with collections relating to Scottish medieval history, moved onto airplanes, then football, then history of surgery and now anatomy collections) and in where you want to work, both geographically and in what type of museum. Smaller museums often offer a chance to get experience in all aspects of the museum industry (research, public engagement, collections management, exhibition development etc.), but you will almost certainly have to get volunteering experience in the heritage sector before starting to get considered for any vacancy. Curator jobs are hard to come by and are often part time or use short term contracts. It's worthwhile thinking of what transferable skills you have and

how you can utilise them within the wider sector (could you develop education materials for museums or podcasts? Can you offer your services as a freelance researcher or developer of exhibitions?).

Exhibitions Officer

Kirsty: To be honest, Exhibitions Officer, wasn't a role I knew existed when I was a student! If you like lots of variety, working with different people, and organising several things at once, then this is the role for you. However, if you enjoy regularity and immersing yourself in one thing at a time, you might find it rather challenging.

My own career has so far been rather varied...After studying History of Art at The University of Aberdeen, I worked for two years as a Sales Manager in a commercial art gallery and framers. This involved hanging new displays, advising customers on framing, managing customer databases, and running the coffee bar. At the same time I volunteered with Aberdeen's council-run museums, helping condition check industrial objects. After this, I decided to take the plunge and enrolled on the Museum and Gallery Studies course at The University of St Andrews. For me, I think this was the key step in my early career development. It would have taken many years of volunteering, to gain the understanding and knowledge this course provided. After completing my masters, I was lucky to move straight into a job as Curatorial Assistant with the Fine Art department at The McManus, Dundee. I was there for four years, curating displays from the permanent collection, working with colleagues to manage touring exhibitions from the V&A, running workshops with the public, re-storing the decorative art collections, and improving the collection management. I enjoyed working across the breadth of the collection and the different tasks this brought. I think this has been key in moving to my role here, as exhibitions officer. On a day-to-day basis, I could be doing anything – from installing a new exhibition, to leading gallery tours, to working with academics and curators to shortlist objects for new exhibitions, to organising technicians and contractors, and developing the exhibition look and feel with external designers. It is key to be able to form relationships quickly, to keep lots of balls in the air at once, and remember to stay calm...it'll be alright on the night.

Museum Collections Management

Anna: Although I've always been interested in libraries and museums, I hadn't ever really considered the heritage sector as a career path until my second year of university. As an undergrad at Manchester University, I studied Literature and Linguistics and, as part of my course, I was offered a behind-the-scenes tour of some of the special collections held at The John Rylands Library. This inspired me to look into a career as a rare books librarian (which I very quickly decided against) and then into the experience and qualifications needed to become an archivist. I found out immediately that the first, and most important, step was to get some hands-on experience as a volunteer.

At this point I'll admit I was very lucky in how my career progressed... My parents lived near to Alnwick Castle in Northumberland and I decided to write and ask for some volunteer experience in their collections department during my summer break, believing I could fit it

in around my waitressing job. However, they replied and offered me 12 weeks of paid work as a Collections Assistant, with my first job cleaning all the rare books in their library. This spurred me on to get further volunteer work when I returned to Manchester for my final year, and I volunteered in the archives of Manchester Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry, and the Royal Northern College of Music.

Upon graduation, I was offered a two-year contract at Alnwick Castle as Documentation Officer, where I worked with a range of collections (from priceless artworks and furniture through to ceramics and taxidermy). Amongst other things, I led audits, organised preventive conservation work, and created Disaster Response and Recovery Plans. In another bit of luck, the University of Edinburgh was looking for a Collections Assistant, with focus on Edinburgh College of Art collections, just as my contract was up. With some persuasion from colleagues, I applied for the job and got it based on my practical experience and the range collections I'd already worked with.

After settling in at the University, I applied for a postgrad scholarship and completed my part-time distance learning Museum and Gallery Studies MLitt at St Andrews University. From there, I've progressed to Museum Collections Manager and continued my personal development through conference and course attendance, as well as providing placements and learning opportunities to those starting out in the sector.

Overall, my top piece of advice would be to get a range of experience to find out the areas of museum-work you're interested in, with focus on smaller museums as you'll get an opportunity to try a bit of everything.

Museum Education Officer

Sarah: I have a background in music education and was a school teacher for three years in my home state of West Virginia. After a fantastic experience in a musical instrument museum, I went through a 'quarter-life' crises and decided that I wanted to work in museums and specifically in a musical instrument museum. I looked into degree programmes and was lucky to be accepted into a programme at the National Music Museum, located on The University of South Dakota, which combined studying for a master's in the history of musical instruments with learning how to work in a museum. The programme included hands-on training in cataloguing, museum management, collections management, and providing tours and educational events. While completing my master's, I was hired as a curator of musical instruments at the National Music Museum, a position I held for 4 years. Eventually I wanted to continue my education and I moved to Edinburgh to complete my PhD in musical instrument history from the University of Edinburgh. My story in Edinburgh is similar to my previous experience in that while in my studies, I was hired to work for St Cecilia's Hall, first in a part-time role as the Audience Development Assistant, and then as the Learning and Engagement Curator.

My advice to people interested in working in museums:

- Don't be afraid to take a chance – even if that involves moving far away from home!

- Make yourself indispensable.
- Part-time jobs can lead to full-time positions.
- Make the most of volunteering. Get involved in as many projects as you can and learn as many new skills as possible – these will help you get a job in the future.
- Become a specialist. Having in-depth knowledge on a subject, even if it is underwater basket weaving, will show that you have a dedication and passion for knowledge.
- Learn how to give a museum tour. This will prepare you for talking in front of groups and for managing groups of people. It will also help you become a better story teller, because giving a tour is all about telling great stories.

Photographer and Digital Reformatting and Production Managers

Carla: Read about my career and experiences within the sector [here](#).

Special Collections / Rare Books Librarian

Elizabeth: Don't do what I did, but it all worked out in the end! Thanks to poor careers advice, I did Librarianship as part of my first degree, instead of as a postgraduate qualification, which remains the better way to qualify. Back in the 1980s Special Collections were widely denigrated as 'irrelevant', and expressing any interest in this area attracted hostility. Nonetheless, I managed to acquire the skillset needed, through option courses in Historical Bibliography and Library History, and a summer work placement with an archival collection.

Lucky breaks have been a big feature of my career – a student job cataloguing music, which no one else could do, was the stepping stone to a retrospective cataloguing project post, which meant I was in the right place when someone retired, and I found myself as Special Collections librarian for a Cambridge college, looking after everything from early printed collections, medieval manuscripts, through to modern personal papers.

Sound technical training, and acquired experience have helped my career weather several family relocations. I worked freelance, mostly cataloguing for the National Trust, which was a great adventure but dependent on being able to be professionally entirely independent. Cataloguing skills got me to Edinburgh, initially on a short, retrospective project. From that I moved into my present curatorial role.

Lots of people want to work with rare books, but if you are serious about it, it is a good idea to acquire a solid knowledge of historical bibliography, to be unafraid of foreign languages, and to build up a knowledge of books and book history. This is one area where your academic work might be directly useful. A curator often has to be an instant expert on anything in the collection and we often put real material in front of candidates at interview to see how they approach it.

These days it is not uncommon to study for a professional qualification while working, though the full-time courses are still there. Not many offer much by way of Special

Collections training, so choose carefully. Networking and building relationships in the profession put you at an instant advantage: join professional bodies, bibliographical societies and special interest groups, volunteer and be seen!

Customer Services and Front of House

Laura: Upon first arriving in Scotland, I had gained some work experience in various customer service roles and was close to completing an undergraduate degree in Medieval Studies. Despite a short stint as an Erasmus exchange student, my English was still a little patchy, and I wasn't sure what career paths would be open to me in this new country. Because I knew I liked books, I started working in a local bookshop, but became increasingly aware that the commercial aspects of bookselling did not appeal to me. My husband, who studied at the University at the time, was a frequent visitor to the CRC, and he suggested that I look into doing some volunteering.

Over the following three years – for one day each week alongside my paid job – I carried out reference research, listed book collections, and cleaned letters in the conservation studio. Most of my time, however, was spent with the User Services team, welcoming readers and answering historic alumni enquiries. I soon realised that I had found my passion working with Special Collections. Even my Medieval Studies degree turned out to be useful from time to time!

Determined to pursue a career in Special Collections, I completed an MSc in Book History, which provided me with a deeper understanding of the theory behind (working with) collections. Since then, I have progressed through the library, starting with a brief stint as a shelver, and going on to work as a Collections Assistant at the Library Annexe. When a job came up in the User Services team in the CRC, all this prior experience was brought together in a diverse, challenging, and exciting position.

Tips: Take every opportunity to learn something new, even if you don't think it will be useful. Many of the things I said 'yes' to turned out to be very helpful in the long run.

Perseverance: I've had to apply many times for the job I have now, but it was totally worth the wait!

Margarita: My first Degree was an MA in Art History at Edinburgh University. I funded myself with several part time jobs, the main one being an Usher at the Edinburgh Filmhouse, I subsequently moved to the box office there and eventually became a duty manager. The hours were flexible and fitted around my studies and continued to fund me at Edinburgh College of Art for a BA in Fine Art and also MA in Fine Art. On leaving Art School I moved to Italy and worked full time as a free-lance artist there and India for 10 years. I came back to Edinburgh and tried to re-immense myself into the art work here but post the global economic markets crash, the art world was tough and unyielding! I kept myself going with other front of house jobs at the Traverse Theatre and also for the Festivals Office at Edinburgh University which eventually led me to this job at St Cecilia's. I work 3 days a week which allows me time to pursue other art projects but means I have a modest but steady income. As we are a small museum, everyone multitasks, so as well as looking

after the reception, I also deal with venue hire, invoicing, writing and giving tours of the instruments (from an art history point of view) and a myriad of other tasks.

Tips: sounds corny but be a team player, always volunteer for things at work and try to go above and beyond the call of duty. Make yourself indispensable! Everyone wants to have a team player around and in these competitive job market times that counts for a lot.

Applications

When you're putting an application together for a job there are a few things to think about:

- It is **essential** to tailor each application to the job you are applying for.
- **Make yourself a list of the bullet points that you should address in your application based on the person specification / job requirements.**
- **Address each of the essential criteria and as many of the desirable criteria as truthfully as possible – but don't just state that you possess a skill, give an example.**
- Work out which are 'soft skills' which relate to your attitude – e.g. Enthusiasm or the ability to work well in a team, and which are concrete skills that relate to your knowledge or experience – e.g. previous experience of conservation or a knowledge of the LC classification.
- Don't try to include everything you have done in your application. If you have a lot of examples for a particular concrete skill select your best example to include in the application.
- Do your research – show that you've learned as much as possible about the organisation and have thought about where your own skills can complement and enhance what is already happening in the organisation.
- Always complete all sections of the application form fully. If you are given the option to supply a CV rather than complete an additional information box it is helpful to supply both. Use the further information box or covering letter to add your reasons for applying for the post and explain how your skills and experiences match the specific job.
- Don't make any negative remarks, either about your own skills or your current or past employment.
- Think about the organisation you are applying to. How do their aims and strengths fit in with your career plans?

Resources

Museums and galleries

- [Museums Association](#) – The national membership body for those working in or interested in museums. Useful for sector news and also run events and advertise jobs.
- [Museums Galleries Scotland](#) – The National Development Body for the museum sector in Scotland, they run skills development programmes and support museums across Scotland.
- [National Museums](#) – Job board, plus members list
- [Museum Jobs](#) – Jobs board, mainly for the UK
- [Leicester University](#) – Great free job, internship and volunteering listings, not just for Leicester University students
- [Group for Education in Museums](#) – Job board and freelancer directory
- [Call for Curators](#) – Curatorial opportunities (includes some entry level positions)
- [Gallery Jobs](#) – Careers advice website, simple overview of gallery roles
- [Scottish Museums Federation](#) – A Scottish-wide organisation that runs an annual programme of events for those interested in the museum sector, offering learning and networking opportunities. Membership is £12 or free for students. Also has a very active blog and social media presence advertising opportunities and interesting articles.
- [Museums Next](#) – A community of museum leaders, makers and innovators who debate ‘what’s next for museums?’ Great for reading about the cutting edge thinking in museums, that might give you the edge when interviewing.

Heritage

- [English Heritage jobs](#) – Jobs, volunteering and job alerts
- [National Trust jobs](#) – Jobs, volunteering and internships advertised
- [National Trust for Scotland](#) – Jobs, volunteering, training and internship opportunities
- [Historic Environment Scotland](#) – Jobs and other opportunities
- [Scottish Natural Heritage](#) – Jobs, volunteering and studentships
- [Historic Royal Palaces](#) – Jobs, volunteering and email alerts
- [Heritage Daily](#) – Heritage and archaeology jobs, mainly US and UK

Libraries and Archives

- [CILIP](#) - the main organisation in the UK representing information professionals. They provide support and professional accreditation to the sector. They list a large number of jobs and opportunities via [Lisjobnet](#).
- [Archives and Records Association](#) - The ARA brings the archives and records keeping communities together by providing education, training and career professional development for the sector. There is a section on their website for careers and support for new professionals. And placements are listed here: <http://www.archives.org.uk/careers/placement-opportunities.html>
- For archives also see the NRA Jiscmail list: ARCHIVES-NRA@JISCMAIL.AC.UK

General art and heritage websites

- [Arts Jobs](#) – Job site by Arts Council England, wide ranging
- [Creative and Cultural Skills](#) – Advice and jobs for creative, heritage, visual arts and theatre
- [Young Professionals in the Arts](#) – diverse range of job site links
- [Arts Job Finder](#) – Job site run by Arts Professional magazine, covering some museums and general arts management.
- [Culture 360](#) – See Opportunities for international jobs, mainly in Asia and Europe
- [Arts Hubs](#) – Wide ranging job site, from curatorial, sales, performance and administration (members only to view some, covers UK, Italy, Australia, USA and Japan)
- [Arts, Culture, Media Jobs](#) – Smaller job site, but with some interesting roles in performance, design, media, culture and arts education.
- [Creative Opportunities](#) – UAL’s creative sector jobs board, but you can register if you’re outside the university too.
- Join LinkedIn groups (you can generally join before you work in the area) to read discussions, find out about other jobs and learn key issues in the sector. Examples include the Arts Administration network, Museum Association group, Theatre Producers group.
- [Academic Jobs](#) – a variety of jobs across Universities in the UK, with a specialist page for library services and information management.

Volunteering Ideas include:

- [English Heritage volunteering](#)
- [National Trust volunteering](#)
- [Do It](#) – The big volunteering database of opportunities by area
- [Guardian Jobs](#) – Save your search to get email alerts
- [Voluntary Arts](#) – See ‘Jobs and opportunities’
- [Arts Festivals](#) – Find local arts festivals near you to research for volunteering or paid work

Internships and Traineeships

- [British Council’s Internship schemes](#) give experience of an international cultural organisation
- [RSA’s internship scheme](#) – helping the organisation find creative solutions to global challenges
- [Creative Access internships](#) (mainly in the media, sometimes in arts organisations) are designed to help increase diversity in the field
- There are many, many more – set up a saved search on [CareerConnect](#) to get weekly emails about internships in this sector.

If you have any comments or questions about this document please contact:

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