

# **Volunteers in Museums: Key Findings and Issues from the Literature**

## **Introduction**

This literature review of volunteering in museums form part of the work the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) has been commissioned to produce by the Baring Foundation. IVR are carrying out a study of the impact of small grants on volunteering in three museums.

The report is in three sections. Section 1 highlights the importance of volunteering to museums. It outlines sources of figures for volunteers in museums and notes the profile of volunteers. Section 2 considers the management of museum volunteers and considers how the involvement and management of volunteers may be influenced by relations between paid and unpaid staff. Section 3 briefly considers how wider social policy objectives impact upon museums before looking at how museums have and could make more of volunteer management good practice.

## **Section 1: The Importance of volunteers in museums.**

Volunteers are a vital resource for many museums (Holmes 1999; 2003); a recent comprehensive audit of Scottish museums noted that museums cannot operate without staff *and* volunteers (Scottish Museums 2002). Research shows that involving volunteers allows museums to extend the services they offer and helps them to do things they would not normally do, it also promotes user involvement and gives added value to the work of museums (IVR 2002). And yet, for institutions that are so heavily reliant on volunteers, the extent to which volunteering is supported in museums is variable. The literature reviewed suggests that this variation centres around three issues: The extent to which volunteer development and management is part of the museum, the position of volunteers in relation to paid staff and the way in which wider social policy issues such as community involvement and social inclusion impact on museums – all these issues will be explored below, but first we look at how many volunteers are active in museums.

### *The extent of volunteering in museums*

Assessing the extent of volunteering in museums, either by looking for data on the museums sector (through examining surveys specifically on museums), or by extrapolating from more general volunteer surveys how many people volunteer in museums is not straightforward.

The most comprehensive sources of volunteering statistics - *The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering* (Davis Smith 1998) and the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS) (Attwood *et al* 2002) are rich reference points giving

total numbers of volunteers in the UK, and detailed information on volunteer demographics. They also provide data about motivation and about what type of work is involved – handling money, being a committee member, giving advice and information and so forth. The surveys also give some information about volunteer's fields of interest – but as it is reported, detail at the level of how many people volunteer in museums is not available: there is no information collected for heritage, and museum volunteers could fall under the grouping 'Hobbies/recreation/arts/social club' for example. However, a museum volunteer answering the HOCS survey might find that the grouping 'Education for adults' or 'The environment/animals' might be equally applicable.

We must therefore look for smaller surveys focussing on museums and the heritage sector. Unfortunately, existing information doesn't form a time-line from which trends can be deduced, nor does it produce a comprehensive review of the sector – rather it focuses on areas such as libraries, arts organisations or museums and galleries, often combining a survey of all three together. It must always be borne in mind that different surveys may have included tighter, or wider, definitions of the type of institution surveyed. Thus, existing sources can only indicate a range of estimates for volunteers in museums.

McGann Matthews Millman Limited (2000) reviewed existing knowledge on volunteer numbers finding estimates of:

- 11,400 in UK museums and 13,600 at heritage sites from research conducted by BTA/ETB Research Services
- 25,206 volunteers in museums estimated by the Museums and Galleries Commission
- The British Association of Friends of Museums estimate that more than 100,000 people volunteer regularly in the heritage sector

Elsewhere a study has estimated that 'About 40,000 people work in museums and at least half of these are volunteers' (Cookman, Haynes and Streatfield 2000:4). The notion that around half of people staffing museums are volunteers is underlined by the audit of Scottish museums that indicated that of the 10, 885 staff and volunteers in the museum sector, 5,736 were volunteers (Scottish Museums 2002).

An alternative way of expressing the extent of volunteering has been to show the percentage of organisations responding to surveys that involve volunteers. Again the McGann, Matthews Millman Limited (2000) review shows that somewhere between a third and a half of museums involve volunteers. This method was also used by Mattingly (1984) in her study of volunteers in museums and galleries, a study repeated by Holmes in 1998. The results show that between 1984 and 1998 the number of museums reporting volunteer involvement fell from 91 per cent to 80 per cent, indicative of perceived trends that the number of people coming forward to volunteer was falling.

Another source of information is research by IVR for Resource (now the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) that surveyed volunteering in museums, libraries and archive (IVR 2002). This research involved fifteen hundred questionnaires being sent to organisations in early summer 2001. The 1500 questionnaires were divided 500 to each of the three domains of museums, libraries and archive. In total 498 completed questionnaires were returned, an overall response rate of 33percent. A total of 166 museums returned the questionnaires.

The first notable finding is that the returns reflect the findings of Mattingly's 1984 study of museums, showing that 92 percent of museums returning the questionnaire involve volunteers (Mattingly 1984). The survey also gave an indication of the scale of volunteer involvement; only seven percent of museums involved over a 100 volunteers while 76 percent involved 40 volunteers or less.

The survey confirmed the importance of volunteers in keeping museums open - one in eight Museums (13%) answering the questionnaire was totally volunteer run. This finding falls somewhere between Mattingly's 1984 study (at just two percent) and Holmes' repeat of that survey in 1998 which found a quarter of a museums are volunteer run. Holmes' finding matches quite closely figures reported by the Association of Museums (Holmes 1998:23). Holmes argues that this growth has occurred in independent museums. Another explanation could be that the Resource survey which used a systematic sampling method under-represented volunteers on governing bodies, whereas the Homes study specifically sampled with volunteers on governing bodies as a factor; conclusions on an apparent drop in all volunteer museums should therefore be made only with caveats and caution. The important role of all volunteer museums is emphasised by Babbidge (2000), who argues that in the current climate it may well only be small and all volunteer museums that escape financial difficulty.

### *The profile of volunteers in museums*

#### Age

Research tends to confirm the picture of museum volunteers as mostly middle aged or retired; for example a 1993 study of the museum sector workforce concluded that voluntary curators were likely to be retired (Scott et al 1993:31), while IVR's work on volunteers in the cultural sector in 2001 found 65percent were aged over 55, and over a third (36%) were over 65 years of age (IVR 2002). Further evidence comes from surveys of volunteers in the National Trust. Although the National Trust may be seen more as part of the wider cultural sector than the museum sector, volunteer roles may be broadly comparable – room stewarding, research, shop work etc. A 1997 survey of volunteers in the National Trust found that 56 percent were aged over 60, while 39 percent were over 65 (IVR 1998). Smith's (2002) work in museums also found an older profile;

however Smith also argues that while museums are over-represented by older volunteers, they also tend to attract younger volunteers too. Smith notes Millar's (1991) assertion that heritage volunteering has developed separately from other forms of volunteers and the profile of volunteers is likely to be atypical.

Certainly national statistics on volunteering would tend to suggest that museums are over-reliant on older volunteers; if the profile of volunteers in museums followed the national profile of volunteers we would expect to see more volunteers aged 35-55 years old than above those ages (Davis Smith 1998, Attwood et al 2002). Despite Smith's (2002) assertions that museums do attract younger volunteers, there is a striking difference in the younger age group in museums taking part in the Resource study. These reported that less than a fifth of their volunteers were below 34 years of age (19%), while just nine percent were aged 18-24 years old. The 1997 National Survey reported that 43 percent of 18-24 years olds engage with voluntary work (Davis Smith 1998), while the Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS), using slightly different age-groupings, reported that 40 percent of 16-24 year olds volunteer (Attwood et al 2002). While this is not saying that museums should expect half their volunteers to be young people, it does suggest that when four out of ten young people are participating in voluntary work, museums are not on the whole engaging effectively with that age group.

#### Gender

The Resource study (IVR 2002) indicated that more women volunteer in museums than men - the survey found that 58 percent of museum volunteers were female. However, it should be noted that other findings suggest that the gender balance tends to reflect the subject interest of the individual museum, for example, Holmes (1999) found that the ratio of men to women in art museums was 25:75, in historical museums it was 60:40, in mixed subjects it was 40:60; while interviews at a transport museum found mostly male volunteers. Holmes suggests that it may be that the preference of one gender for a subject matter historically, prevents a balance of gender being achieved over time as it may be that a team, once established, becomes more difficult to break into – 'in the same way, a group consisting predominantly of people from one social class may be off-putting to people from other classes' (Holmes 1999:25) – suggesting a role for volunteer co-ordinators to address diversity.

#### Ethnicity

Findings from the Resource survey (IVR 2002) suggest that museums need to look at volunteer profiles in terms of ethnicity as well as age and gender. Statistics from the survey find that museum volunteers are 95 percent were white, two percent were from Black and Asian groups and two percent from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Within the broader cultural sector however, museums are twice as likely to involve Black and Minority Ethnic volunteers than either libraries or archives (IVR 2002).

Again it should be noted that these figures are national, regional variations are likely to exist with higher numbers of Black and Minority Ethnic volunteers in areas of high of Black and Minority Ethnic population concentrations. Nevertheless, looking again at national statistics, the HOCS ((Attwood et al 2002), shows that people from a Black, or Black British background are *more* likely to volunteer than any other ethnic group. It has long been held that people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities are more likely to volunteer in their own communities, but the HOCS results must cast some doubt over that – Black women are more likely than any other group to be involved in formal volunteering (although Asian women are the least likely). This may suggest that museums should be more successful at recruiting volunteers from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. However where people volunteer is dependent on a variety of factors – Black people for example are nearly three times as likely as White people engage in volunteering in a religious context (Attwood et al 2002). Such explanation – that Black volunteering could be explicable in terms of attachment to religion - is not an excuse for complacency, other research suggests that volunteer-involving organisations consciously, or unconsciously have barriers that deter potential volunteers from BME communities,( and those that are disabled) (IVR 2004).

#### Disability

The Resource study (IVR 2002) found that, on average, seven percent of museum volunteers have a disability. However findings about disability need to be treated with caution. Disability is both difficult to define on questionnaires and, on this occasion, data was obtained through museum staff reporting on the number of disabled volunteers. Clearly this relied on staff knowing which volunteers have, or have declared a disability. It is quite possible that volunteers with disabilities that do not require modification to their task or extra support, may not have made the museum aware.

#### *What do volunteers do in museums?*

The table (table 1) below shows the spread of volunteer tasks identified in the research for Resource (Institute for Volunteering Research 2002) and shows a mixture of managerial, front-of-house and behind the scenes roles (for a definition of these see, for example, Chambers 1997).

**Table 1:Tasks Volunteers Perform in Museums**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Research	105
Archives work	92
Display / exhibition	92
Guiding / interpretation	81
Committee work	70
Administration	62
Conservation / restoration	59
Fundraising	59
Sales / information	54
Library work	52
Information and communication technology	49
Finds processing	33
Management	30
Curatorial training	22
Excavation / fieldwork	12
Other	63
<b>Base</b>	<b>152</b>

(Source IVR 2002)

### *Motivations to volunteer*

Assessing the motivation of volunteers is key in ensuring that volunteers are well matched to tasks – that is, that volunteers are given roles that are stimulating and interesting for them, but also useful for the museum. Identifying motivations is harder, it is often said that there is an endless list of possible motivations to volunteer (Ellis 1994).

One piece of work by Clary *et al* (1998) has attempted to group motivations. Clary and his colleagues have developed a Volunteers Functions Inventory which identifies six primary motivations (or functions) for volunteering. These are:

1. The Values Function: which enables volunteers to act on deeply held beliefs about the importance of helping others – *I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.*

2. The Understanding Function: which enables volunteers to satisfy a desire to understand beneficiaries, organisations or the volunteer him/herself - *Allows me to gain a new perspective on things.*

3. The Career Function: which enables volunteers to learn new skills – *Will look good on my cv.*

4. The Social Function: which enables volunteers to meet people, make friends.

And two which 'represent ways in which volunteering is undertaken for the specific purpose of making one feel better about oneself'.

5. The Esteem Function is the positive aspect of this – *Makes me feel needed.*

6. The Protective Function is the negative aspect – *Helps me work through my own personal problems.*

Such a list can be helpful in outlining the possible reasons for volunteers coming forward. With that understanding a volunteer manager can think through what a volunteer's needs might be– if, for example, a volunteer participates through a desire to be social, giving them a task archiving material in isolation may not be conducive to their needs. Holmes (1999) suggests that the major motivations behind choosing to volunteer in heritage sector are often different to volunteers working in other capacities. These include:

- A love of objects, history or a historic buildings which is not the same as motivations to help people;
- A need to gain work experience for a career in the heritage industry;
- Social – to fill time and meet people, especially among the retired, who form a large proportion of these volunteers.'

But, these are not too dissimilar from the motivations outlined by Clary and his colleagues (Clary *et al* 1998), and on this basis it seems that managing volunteers in museums can learn from what is known about volunteer management generally (Murch 1999).

## **Section 2: Managing volunteers in museums**

The extent to which volunteers should be managed, and what form that management should take, has been the subject of debate for some time. There are increasing demands for professionalisation in volunteer-involving organisations and while some argue that managing volunteers is against the spirit of volunteering, others maintain that the issue is really one of finding appropriate ways to manage volunteers. This school of thought contends that it is the tendency for practices to be imported from paid to unpaid work that is problematic not the principle of volunteer organisation or management (*ibid*).

Arguments supporting a greater role for management come from a variety of sources; but it is the oft-quoted statistic from the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, that 71 percent of volunteers identified that 'Things could be much better organised' as a drawback of their volunteering (and 34 percent said that they got bored with their work and lost interest in it)(Davis Smith 1998) that is

repeatedly used to show that volunteers themselves are demanding better management. Research also shows that if volunteers feel valued and appreciated, and feel that organisations genuinely care about their efforts and well-being, withdrawal intentions are lower (Farmer and Fedor 1999). Such arguments have helped to ensure that volunteer management is being taken very seriously by volunteer-involving organisations.

Zimmeck (2001) notes that despite the importance of volunteering, most organisations have taken a fairly cavalier approach to it, giving too little consideration to what they can do for volunteering and too much to what volunteering can do for them. A snapshot survey drawn from members of the National Centre for Volunteering (IVR 1998b) showed that Zimmeck's point might not be true in terms of having management procedures - four out of five volunteer-involving organisations had a designated volunteer co-ordinator/manager or equivalent post. It also showed that those organisations with such a post were more likely to have more volunteers than those without (ibid). It should be borne in mind, however, that as the sample was drawn from members of the National Centre for Volunteering we might expect a higher incidence of management.

Similar debates about volunteer management are to be found in the museum and heritage sector. Holmes (2004) argues that the move towards professional management of volunteers in museums mirrors both the debates in volunteer management and the moves to more professional management of museums typified by the move to continuous professional development for members of the Museums Association.

The survey carried out for Resource (IVR 2002) suggests that museums are managing volunteers to a high degree; fully 91 percent of museums indicated that somebody was responsible for the management and deployment of volunteers. In 57 percent of museums this was somebody who had been specifically designated to manage volunteers, however, a much smaller number – just 10, had a role with overall responsibility for volunteers – others performed the volunteer co-ordinator role alongside other roles. In 34 per cent of cases the role of managing volunteers was carried out by someone – or more than one person – who had not been designated specifically for that job, that is nether volunteer co-ordinator or anything similar appeared in their title. Nine percent of museums had nobody co-ordinating or managing volunteers.

Another way of looking at how volunteers are managed is by looking at what policies and procedures are in place. Looking at the Resource study we find that 91 percent of museums say they provide training for volunteers, 60 percent induct volunteers into the museums and their role, but only half of museums pay expenses – a recognised aspect of good practice (especially when considering lowering the entry barriers into volunteering for some groups). Only four out of ten museums (41percent) had a volunteer policy (IVR 2002).

So what are the advantages of having a volunteer manager in a museum? Van Tiernan (echoing the retention work of Farmer and Fedor 1999)) argues that 'Volunteers tend to show more respect for a museum if the museum cares enough about their volunteers to appoint a staff member who is dedicated to the volunteer program' (Van Tiernan 2001:1). She goes on to say 'There are benefits to paid staff as well as to volunteers. Paid staff know that the volunteer program will run smoothly, and that if they need extra skills or hands, that they can be provided (they don't have to hunt for them themselves)'

Gay's (2000) work on volunteer managers noted that the modern origin of a paid volunteer managers function can be traced to the health service in the early 1960's. Since then the role has expanded to a point where Gay (2000:48)

listed broad functions as:

- Personnel work
- Training volunteers
- Supporting volunteers
- Administration
- An entrepreneurial/ development function.

Gay's findings echo those of other research (see for example Lishman and Wardell 1998), while Willis (1997) argues that effective management of volunteers involves four interrelated tasks: strategic planning; the face-to-face management of volunteers; managing volunteer participation and the information management task – that is the need for effective information about volunteers.

Van Tiernan (2001) fleshes this out in the context of museum volunteer managers to include:

- Recruiting and training volunteers;
- Job matching volunteers and developing suitable teams;
- Evaluating volunteers, projects and policies;
- Balancing people management with project management;
- Bidding for funds and balancing the books;
- Ensuring legal issues are addressed.

Without a dedicated manager, Van Tiernan argues, these are a lot of extra duties to ask of a paid staff member who works with volunteers.

Help for prospective (and experienced) volunteer managers exists in disparate forms. At the moment there is no recognised qualification for volunteer managers, although standards exist through the Occupational Standards for Volunteers Managers and the Excellence in Volunteer Management Programme

being run by Volunteering England. There also exists in the UK a ListServ of volunteer managers – the UK Volunteer Managers Forum - that acts as a support group and forum for swapping good practice. Alongside these are general 'How to' books on volunteer management (for example McCurley and Lynch 1998; Bowgett *et al* 2002), ones specific for volunteer management in museums are also available (For example see Walton 1999; Ferneley *et al* 1999).

There are, then, arguments that some form of volunteer management should take place. This does not mean that the task should be designated to a dedicated post – some organisations will always be too small to be able to sustain a paid volunteer manager post. But, evidence and best practice suggests that the organisation of volunteers does need thinking about; as one recognised writer and trainer on volunteering recently noted 'You just can't run a successful volunteer program by the seat of your pants anymore' (Hawthorne 2002).

The role played by a volunteer manager is highlighted in research by Gaskin (2003). This research sought to find out from volunteers what, from their perspective, makes a good volunteer manager. The answer was 'A choice Blend' in which the manager (or person responsible for co-ordinating volunteer) should ensure that volunteers do not feel used, unappreciated, not consulted and not accommodated. Volunteers want to feel welcome, secure, respected and informed. The task for managers, says Gaskin is to combine choice and control, and flexibility and organisation, so volunteer experience their participation as a blend of both informality and efficiency and of personal and professional support.

Gaskin's work (*ibid*) also provides a road-map to direct the 'doubter' (someone sceptical about the idea of volunteering into the 'starter' and then the 'stayer'. Much of this revolves around communicating the message of what volunteers can do and expect in return. It provides interesting reading for volunteer-managers, or indeed any organisation involving volunteers whether they choose to have a volunteer manager or not.

Looking at volunteers in museums in the light of Gaskin's, and other's research, illuminates several issues. First is that of the age of volunteers. We have noted that volunteers in museums are mostly older, although we also noted that younger people might wish to volunteer for experience. Organisations need to be aware that younger and older volunteers may well have different motivations and thus require a different type of management.

In earlier research Gaskin (1998) showed how young people often want to volunteer for skills and experience. Gaskin found that where organisations offered flexible volunteering – that is roles and tasks that could be packaged to fit with the competing demands young people have in their lives, they were more likely to appeal to the young. Other research on young peoples' attitudes to volunteering confirms this (Ellis 2004).

The Resource research (Institute for Volunteering Research 2002) also found that museums relied on volunteers approaching them, or word of mouth. While the latter is seen as the most effective way to recruit volunteers (Davis Smith 1997), it often relies on known volunteers recruiting friends – a strategy which has the drawback of ‘like recruiting like’. In other words it works against diversification. Gaskin’s work on attracting doubters (2003) and other work around diversity (see for example Institute for Volunteering Research 2004b) shows that volunteer-involving organisations have to engage with other ways and outlets if they are to offer their volunteering opportunities to a wider range of potential volunteers.

### *Barriers to good volunteer involvement*

This section looks at what prevents volunteers being effectively involved in museums.

#### No time to manage

Data from the survey for Resource suggested that volunteers may not be highly valued by all museums. When asked the main reason for involving volunteers, alongside positive responses about extending the reach of the museum, 55 indicated that they involved volunteers to save money. In itself this is not a troubling answer, volunteers are generally cost efficient and as long as organisations remember that volunteers are cost effective, but not cost free (for example see Gaskin 1999 for research on ‘notional’ returns from volunteers against investment in training and support), then volunteer programmes can flourish. It is when organisations involve volunteers only to save money that problems arise.

Elsewhere the Resource research showed that one hundred and twenty three organisations responding to the survey did not involve any volunteers- of this amount 14 were museums. Half of the museums said that it was too time consuming; one museum identified ‘more staff and money’ as the things that would encourage the museum to involve more volunteers – that is, instead of volunteers saving money and reducing staff numbers, more of each were felt necessary in order to involve more volunteers.

Interestingly a further set of museums indicated that volunteers were either not professional enough, or that their work did not meet required standards. The literature also highlighted issues of volunteers not being involved in museums because of difficulty with paid staff relations and it is to this that we now turn.

#### *Volunteers aren’t all they are cracked up to be*

Jago and Deery (2002) studied volunteering in tourist and heritage tourism sites in Australia, their work concluded that volunteers provided a cost effective means of providing a quality service. Interestingly however, the study highlighted an on-going issue in museums – that of professionalism. Asking visitors perceptions of

quality of service from paid staff and volunteers, there was no statistical difference in the rating of quality. Once the staff and volunteers were asked however, volunteers emphasised that quality should mean being passionate about the subject and service. Staff on the other hand used words like 'professional', 'accurate', 'timely' and 'reliable' – inferring that only paid staff could exhibit these traits.

The issue of professionalism is one that can arise when paid staff and volunteers work together. Goodall's (2000) study of charity shops noted that in some establishments where an ethos of fundraising for the charity had overtaken the voluntary ethos, there was a tendency for professionals to want to exclude volunteers - the professionals felt that volunteers were as getting in the way. In museums a related issue can arise, professionals- in this case museum staff - can see volunteers as amateurish in the way they are representing the learning function of the museum. Silver (1978) writing of experiences in America argues that there is a tendency to professionalise museum educators in such a way that volunteers can be excluded. Graham and Lennon (2002) concluded from their case study work in Scottish visitor attractions that 'There is no doubt that that professional and occupational segregation is evident in the cultural and heritage organisations' (p219). Grant and Lennon's work argued that museums and visitor attractions had problems involving volunteers who either were not seen as professional (at least in part because they seemed to have no interest in training), or were treated with suspicion – one curator said that retired managers were not welcome as volunteers because of their tendency to try to take over. At the root of the problems is '...a common assumption among volunteers and the people who supervise them that they cannot be controlled in the same way as paid staff' (Graham and Lennon 2002:217). The authors, however, argue that applying proven people management techniques can overcome such issues.

Elsewhere, other authors note the tensions between paid staff and volunteers in museums; Harrison (2002) during a two-day residential event with volunteers and volunteer managers from museums, libraries, archives and arts organisations in the South West of England, found that and relations between paid and volunteer staff 'was highlighted as an area of real tension' (p18). Volunteers felt invisible, or of a lower status, while paid staff felt threatened by volunteers, either as a challenge to their expertise and authority, or to their jobs. A museum volunteer manager interviewed during the Resource research noted that ' Sometimes the difficulties arise when volunteers, particularly those who have been in senior positions, want to do things in their own way which is not necessarily the museum's way' (Institute for Volunteering Research 2002).

Smith (2002) in her research with managers and volunteers over 12 sites also noted that a lack of professionalism was noted as an issue with involving volunteers. Meanwhile Frey (1998) notes that because volunteers are not paid they do not have to do as they are asked, unlike paid staff who are therefore more productive. In Frey's arguments this needs addressing as volunteers plat a

substantial role in 'superstar' museums. Manitta (2001) simply argues that well-intentioned, but under-supervised volunteers have been known to damage objects, and that volunteers can lack the extensive learning, experience and mental rigour to make sound judgements about conserving objects. Although she does argue that training and supervision of volunteers can help.

It should be noted that issues between paid staff and volunteers are not solely one of expert professionals concerned about volunteers misrepresenting collections. There is equally concern from other paid staff that volunteers may threaten jobs. Local authority run museums are particularly sensitive to the issues of substitution by volunteers for paid staff, but so too are libraries and archives. This is likely to be because unions are more active in these. In fact, this issue is common whenever volunteers are involved or an increase of volunteer involvement is contemplated (Graff 1984).

There are legitimate questions over what it is appropriate for volunteers to do, and a number of museums have policies indicating that they will not use volunteers to perform core functions or basic operational work (Millar 1991). Graff (1984) reviewing the issue of volunteers and paid staff working together makes a distinction between the displacement of staff and the replacement of staff. Displacement is where volunteers perform the role of paid staff whose position remains but they are diverted onto other work. Graff reports that this is an issue about which paid workers are concerned, she notes however that volunteer leaders, at least, hold that such practice is unethical. Replacement is where paid staff are lost and volunteers take over the role. Graff argues that this is different from displacement because it is likely that volunteer recruitment is not the source of job loss – rather it is likely to be that funding shortfall means jobs are lost and volunteers may be the only way to keep a vital service going. Unions, of course argue that the awareness of the potential to recruit volunteers may contribute to a decision to withdraw funding. Graff argues that management, staff and volunteers need to be clear about the purpose of involving volunteers, the type of tasks volunteers will be performing and the limits to that work. She goes on to add that a clear policy is required and that, ideally, should be decided between management, staff and volunteers.

The *Drain Guidelines* (Volunteer Centre UK 1990) drawn up by the then Volunteer Centre UK, outlines eight general guidelines for organisations with paid staff and volunteers. These centre again around the idea that volunteer activity should complement the work of paid staff, not substitute for it and that the action of volunteers should not threaten the livelihood of paid staff. The guidelines were produced to guide organisations in the health and personal social care field – but are widely referred to by all types of volunteer-involving organisation.

### **Section 3: The wider social policy perspective**

In line with their policy of promoting volunteering in general, the government wishes to encourage museums and galleries to expand their use of volunteers. In the introduction to the policy paper *Centres for Social Change* (DCMS 2000), the then Culture Secretary Chris Smith argued 'we believe that public services can benefit from a mix of people contributing to them not as an alternative to paid staff but to complement the work they do'. In particular he wants museums and libraries 'to use volunteers to enhance services and as a way of directly including disadvantaged people in the work of the organisation'. In other words moves are afoot to encourage museums to involve volunteers to address public policy areas – in the case of Smith's argument, museums can help combat social exclusion and the directive element of the Policy Guidance is clear, under a heading about consulting people at risk of social exclusion about their needs and aspirations, the Guidance says 'Governing bodies should also consider the role of volunteers, both within the museum, gallery or archive, or from within the community itself, as a means to achieve this and to involve the community in the work of the organisation' (DCMS 2002:16).

In 2001 the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) published *Renaissance for the Regions* a framework arguing for all museums and galleries to work together to better deliver education and learning and to improve access and social inclusion. This, at least implicitly, also urges museums to involve community members as volunteers.

To what extent are museums required to respond to these calls and what impact will they have? Graham and Lennon (2002) make the point that there is pressure on museums to reduce their reliance on public money. Is there a temptation for museums to see volunteers as a cheap alternative to paid labour? The Resource survey indicated that 55 museums out of the 166 museums answering the questionnaire indicated that a reason to involve volunteers was that they saved museums money. However more (82) identified it as promoting user involvement. The DCMS and MLA policy documents hint that involvement – which may include volunteering – is an important issue. As such museums may want to review, and seek additional help, in including and managing more diverse volunteers.

Flagship museums lead the way on what can be done to involve volunteers and to address these wider policy objectives. The Imperial War Museum North, for example, is being held up as an exemplar of what can be achieved (Blackadder 2002, Imperial War Museum undated). The museum consciously moved to invite members of the local community (from the surrounding parts of Manchester and Trafford some of which have been identified as areas of major social and economic regeneration by government) to volunteer in return for free training and work experience. The museums had to overcome many barriers inviting in volunteers who lacked confidence and were apprehensive about training. The

volunteer programme thought very carefully about how to approach and recruit volunteers and spent a long time with referral agencies, using them to help explain to their clients what the programme was about.

The museum worked hard to identify individual motivations and tried to match needs and expectations as honestly as they could. The programme also worked with staff to explain how volunteers were being involved and answered questions and concerns about the impact of involving volunteers on their jobs.

The Imperial War Museum North experience shows how a museum can embrace the social inclusion agenda – but it also demonstrates that this cannot be done without a lot of work and thought.

## **Conclusion**

Involving volunteers is important for museums, it allows museums to do things they would not normally be able to do – extending services or creating new aspects of services, for example. However, museums face a number of challenges. It would appear that museum volunteers are getting older, and fresh ideas are needed to encourage younger people to get involved. Museums also need to be aware of debates in the wider volunteer-involving sector about recruiting, retaining and managing volunteers. Research shows that many museums do have volunteer managers, it also shows there are a sizeable number of all-volunteer museums. Volunteer management need not imply a paid post – but it does imply that volunteer involvement is recognised as needing attention. The need for awareness that volunteers are not an homogenous entity, but require recognition in terms of motivations and needs is brought home by the push from government to make museums more inclusive of non-traditional volunteers. That being said, there are examples of museums who are at the forefront of this work; good practice exists within the sector, but it may need wider dissemination.

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