

UMAC-03: Work Placement Project

There is great concern in the heritage and arts sector over the methods by which people can obtain valuable work experience. A number of careers for arts and humanities students are highly competitive and little guidance is given on obtaining experience or subsequent career strategies. The University of Reading collections have always had a significant number of student volunteers but volunteering has been *ad hoc* and has often proven to be a drain on staff time.

Just prior to the launch of the CETL, a Volunteer Development Project was set up with the aim of standardising the administration and supervision of volunteers. The initial phase enable a Volunteer Officer to centralise the existing arrangements, formalising the marketing, training provision and recording of work experience. However the project looked to move beyond the demands of work experience on the student's part and cheap labour on the part of the museums.

Collections-based volunteering, with its combination of subject specific and transferable skills and its emphasis on self-directed work with primary evidence, fitted in to CETL-AURRS definition of research skills. Thus the project was brought in to the CETL framework, supervised by the MERL Undergraduate Learning Officer and the guidance of CETL staff. This not only provided a basic support system and managerial framework, but also expanded the aims of the project by integrating volunteer work in to the wider pedagogical context of research skills and work-based learning.

With the support of CETL staff this is being developed further to offer a wider range of opportunities, training and career advice to students. This will involve the creation of formal qualifications for students who undertake work placements in the university collections.

This project is still in the development phase but has been successful in centralising volunteer activity within the University and expanding the range of opportunities available for skills development. In addition the innovative work is creating recognition across the region.



Project Code: UMAC-03**Discipline: University Museums & Collections****Project title: University Collections Work Placement Project**

Description: There is great concern in the heritage and arts sector over the methods by which people obtain valuable work experience. A number of careers for arts and humanities students are highly competitive and little guidance is given on obtaining experience or subsequent career strategies. The University of Reading collections have always had a significant number of student volunteers but volunteering has been *ad hoc* and has often proven to be a drain on staff time. A Volunteer Development project, with the aim of standardising the administration and supervision of volunteers, was established prior to the launch of the CETL. It has been further developed with CETL funding and its aims are now much wider, involving the integration of volunteer work in to the wider pedagogical context of research skills and work based learning. This is being developed further to offer a wider range of opportunities, training and career advice to students, and creating formal qualifications for students who undertake work placements in the university collections.

A What is the perceived problem or challenge?	B Enabling Factors What resources will facilitate the project?	C Processes How is this project going to be achieved?	D Objectives What is the end product or result of the project?	E Evaluation Data What methods can be used to demonstrate the success or impact of this project?	F Unintended consequences What have been the unintended consequences of enacting this project?
<p>National Agenda: Workforce development in the arts and heritage sector is problematic, with few opportunities for gaining experience after leaving full-time education.</p> <p>Staff perspective: Well-organised volunteering can make a valuable contribution but in the past there has been no formal volunteering scheme meaning that volunteering has drained rather than supported UMAC.</p> <p>Student perspective: Volunteering opportunities enable students to develop a range of research and transferable skills not taught via the curriculum. Students often find it difficult to set up work placements in museums and when they do, the placements can be <i>ad hoc</i> with little formal training and little variety in the tasks performed.</p>	<p>Staffing: The Undergraduate Learning Officer will promote, develop and deliver the use of MERL in undergraduate teaching across the university. A Volunteer Development Project Officer will be appointed – not CETL funded but line managed by the Undergraduate Learning Officer, allowing volunteer work to be integrated into a wider programme of collections-based learning for undergraduates. It will also allow work to be led by the pedagogical theory and practise underlying other work on collections based learning and research skills. This structure also provides the opportunity for collaborative projects.</p> <p>Organisation: Central registration of all volunteers and volunteer projects with the Volunteer Development Project Officer will be required.</p>	<p>a) Develop a formal volunteer training programme with teaching and pedagogical context provided by the ULO and a focus on the development of subject specific and transferable skills.</p> <p>b) Recording details of the training and tasks undertaken by all volunteers will enable UMAC to provide professional references.</p> <p>c) Marketing activities will recruit a wider range of student volunteers. New MERL modules will provide an opportunity for recruiting volunteers and vice-versa.</p> <p>d) The ULO and Careers Advisory Service will provide support for students who plan to work in the heritage and arts sector.</p> <p>e) Centralisation of volunteer management with cross campus links will allow students to gain experience in different collections</p> <p>f) The range of projects available will be extended to attract different students and expand the range of subject specific and transferable skills developed.</p> <p>g) Planned development of a non-credit bearing module for volunteering. The ULO will provide pedagogical context and link with other CETLs involved in the development of work-based learning programmes.</p> <p>h) Plan provision of trained volunteers for other local museums, thus offering a wider range of opportunities for students and developing the museum's status as a centre for excellence in the region.</p>	<p>The student perspective: Provide students with the opportunity to gain experience in a real work environment. This will give students a great advantage over others leaving full-time education. Work with collections develops a range of transferable and subject specific skills through direct contact with primary evidence that will benefit students in the curriculum and the workplace.</p> <p>The staff perspective: Well-organised volunteer projects will free up staff time for essential projects. Volunteer work will allow the Collections to improve their collections management and interpretation. Volunteering will give UMAC staff the opportunity to develop their training and management skills.</p> <p>National Agenda: Provide a model for using university collections to enhance workforce development strategies. Provision of trained volunteers for other museums in the local area allows non-university museums to benefit from this project.</p>	<p>Evaluation of individual experience: Measurement of the skills obtained as a result of the voluntary work. Feedback from a sample of students one year after voluntary work on the career benefits</p> <p>Evaluation of the cumulative effect upon the University: Track the number of volunteers and the number of volunteer hours provided. Track the number of students finding jobs in the sector after leaving university. Measure the range of projects being undertaken by volunteers</p> <p>Possible National Impact: Gauge the degree of interest generated in the national and international community of university museums via dissemination at conferences Record relevant partnerships with other institutions.</p>	<p>Many volunteers are engaging with collections in other ways e.g. taking formally taught modules, applying for UROP placements and bringing in friends and family. Links with regional agency for museums, libraries and archives on workforce development with proposed joint bid for funding. Providing training to other museums in the South East on volunteer development.</p>

UMAC-03: Work Placement Project

1. Project Progress and Timeline

1.1 Timeline

Done	Project stage	planned	actual date end date
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Centralisation of volunteer programme	Oct 2006	Oct 2006
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Standardisation of training programme and investigation of funding for formalised volunteer training programme	March 2007	March 2007
<input type="checkbox"/>	Design of formal volunteer training programme	Sept 2007	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Delivery of formal programme	June 2008	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluation	Sept 2008	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Further development	2010	

1.2 Enabling Factors: State the resources used in this L&T-enhancement project

The principle resource used in this project is staff time, as outlined below.

October 2005-2010: *Undergraduate Learning Officer* line managing the *Volunteer Development Project Officer* - (3 hours a week staff costs)

March 2007-June 2008: The *Undergraduate Learning Officer's* time (31 days, c.£4650) contributing to a joint project with the CETL Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) for the design of a formal training programme for Museum volunteers.

Sept 2007-June 2008: *Undergraduate Learning Officer's* time delivering formal training programme (5 days, c. £750). This may be ongoing depending on the evaluation of the joint project with CCMS.

1.3 Processes: What were the key challenges in delivering this project?

The key challenges were:

a) developing a formal volunteer training programme:

The first stage took place through collaboration with external consultants and through the contribution of other University Museum and Collections (UMAC) staff.

However, in the second phase the involvement of the Undergraduate Learning Officer has allowed the volunteer development project to be placed into a wider and more ambitious pedagogical context. By facilitating links with other CETLs and providing pedagogical guidance on the development of new training, the involvement of CETL staff has allowed us to develop our existing training programme into an accredited module (see point 'g'). However, there have been challenges in terms of timetabling these development activities alongside the existing responsibilities of the Undergraduate Learning Officer. The project has also involved negotiating with a variety of different stake-holders, creating challenges in terms of keeping this project within the focus of the CETL and the development of research skills in undergraduate students.

The next phase of this project will also require extra funding for staff time. This funding has been secured in principle through the development of a joint project with another CETL based at Reading: CCMS (the Centre for Careers Management Skills). However, care

will need to be taken to ensure the effective continuation of the Undergraduate Learning Officer/Volunteer Development Officer structure.



Student volunteer providing a guided tour of the museum – one of the new training programmes developed as part of the Volunteer Development Project.

b) recording details of the training and tasks undertaken by all volunteers was necessary in order to enable UMAC to provide professional references for volunteers: This has taken place without any problems.

c) marketing activities to recruit a wider range of student volunteers:

This has taken place through liaising with the *Careers Advisory Service* and publicising opportunities at their events. The new modules (developed as part of project UMAC01/02) have provided an opportunity to market volunteering opportunities and recruit well trained and enthusiastic students. Equally the modules have been marketed to existing volunteers.

d) working with *Careers Advisory Service* to provide support for students who plan to work in the heritage and arts sector:

See above. This has also involved the creation of resources for the *careers advisory service* and informal advisory sessions for students. The *Undergraduate Learning Officer* is now the main contact for the *Careers Service* on the subject of the heritage sector. We are in the planning stages to develop a formal event on careers in heritage in the near future. There have been occasional problems with the fact that there are several points of contact within the *Careers Advisory Service*, so while they know to contact us we have not always known who to get in touch with on a specific issue. This was exacerbated by a number of staff changes but has however recently been resolved.

e) centralising the management of all student collections volunteers at MERL while including work on other museum collections to broaden the students' experience:

While the centralisation has been successful for the most part, it has not been without difficulties. These have mainly been because some staff looking after other collections do

not have the time or the inclination to liaise with the *Volunteer Development Officer*. We are unsure of the exact reasons for this: some staff seem to think that we cannot find suitable volunteers, others simply do not want to change their routines, in other cases it is just a case of forgetting to liaise. However, as the project is increasingly successful and the *Volunteer Development Officer* is getting a higher profile, we are finding that more people are taking advantage of this opportunity. As the post is relatively junior, the backing of senior staff and the support and guidance of the Undergraduate Learning Officer and the CETL are extremely important in giving weight to this project.

f) extending the range of volunteer projects to attract different students and expand the range of skills they develop:

We were able to expand the range of opportunities with regards to our own guidelines on volunteer tasks. However, we found that some popular ideas were not workable in reality e.g. exhibition design. The involvement of the Undergraduate learning Officer was key in providing working examples from other institutions and providing the theoretical underpinning for skills development.

The creation of the MERL garden and advice from Thrive (Using Gardens to change lives: www.thrive.org.uk), RISC (Reading International Solidarity Centre - Edible Roof Garden www.risc.org.uk/garden) and the Eden Project is allowing us to develop environmental projects for volunteers. We are hoping that the creation of a new module “*Communicating Science in Museums*” (as part of the project UMAC01/02) may help to develop a new group of science-based volunteers for whom projects can be devised.

There have been some problems for staff and students in conceptualising the link between volunteer work and research skills. This has been due in part to a narrow understanding of what constitutes research. Most museum professionals would not define their work as research despite the fact that they often undertake extensive investigative projects using primary evidence as part of their jobs. By seeking out opportunities for students to undertake some kind of independent enquiry alongside more mundane volunteer tasks and by using formal teaching resources and staff in volunteer training we have gone some way towards improving the image of volunteer work and blurring the perceived line between curricula and extra-curricula skills development.



A student volunteer assisting on a Creative Partnerships ‘Museums as Launchpads’ project in which a local artist worked with a local school to create a sculptural piece for the museum garden.

g) developing a non-credit bearing module for volunteering – which will be included on student’s degree transcripts:

See above. This shift in the concept of volunteer work as a method of skills development has been greatly affected by the move for an accredited volunteer module. In the early stages it was suggested that a module be developed by staff alongside their other activities. However, after mapping out a timetable for module development it was found that the formalisation of training into accredited modules would involve more staff time than originally projected. A joint project with CCMS to develop a range of formal modules could address this issue by paying for staff to develop modules which give accreditation of student voluntary work. However, for this to proceed, a clearer idea about the sustainability of delivering a module for students for which there would be no resource has to be established (for example, teaching volunteer students alongside credit-bearing continuing education students). This is currently under negotiation with the School of Continuing Education who will most likely provide the accreditation and quality assurance for these modules.

2. Outputs and Evaluation

2.1 List the evaluation data collected

Date	Quantitative or qualitative	Evaluation by	Description / Method
Jun 07	qualitative	MLA South East partnership	Inclusion of UMACs volunteer programme in MLA South East Workforce Development Strategy Document
Ongoing	quantitative	Tracking volunteer numbers	Excel spreadsheet of all volunteer contacts
Jan 07	quantitative	Tracking volunteer hours	Creation of volunteer log-book held at every site across campus with information consolidated by Volunteer Development Project Officer
Ongoing	quantitative	Range of projects	Collection of project briefs

2.2 Summarise the key results from your data

We are becoming known in the region as an innovative institution with regards to our work with volunteers. This is evidenced by our inclusion in the *Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) South East Workforce Development Strategy Document* in its stated aim of ‘Work alongside Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning [sic] to pioneer collections based training’.

We are also finding that there is a great desire amongst students to undertake work placements in the campus collections as evidenced by the fact that at one point we had 150 students registered as potential volunteers.

The centralisation of the system also seems to be working as we are finding that we are able to keep track of volunteer work, organise placements and provide references in a way that was often impossible in the past i.e. staff know that all information and enquiries go straight to the volunteer officer who then organises appropriate action.

At careers events we have met students who are eager to get experience from early on in their university careers; anecdotal evidence suggests that in the past most student volunteers were in their third year while current figures suggest a large number of first and second year students. In a wider sense this could indicate a wider awareness amongst the undergraduate community of the need to develop employability skills.

We are also finding that volunteers can undertake a number of projects that we had not conceived of in the past due to the lack of resources and information available. Advice from other agencies (e.g. Thrive, the Eden Project, the Reading Volunteer helpdesk and the Museums Association) has allowed us to explore what is possible and to enhance our volunteer provision and the work that we are able to undertake.

We are also finding that by directly referring to skills development in project briefs and in our recruitment activities staff and students are becoming more aware of the potential long term benefits of voluntary work for undergraduate students and other volunteers.



Student volunteers cataloguing objects at the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology

2.3 How do you, as the PI, summarise the success of this project?

This project has been successful as it was part of a much wider drive to standardise use of collections across campus. There was a definite need for this project which explains why many staff have been so engaged and eager to help.

We have a much larger number of volunteers than ever before on a wider range of projects which is proving useful to both the volunteers and UMACS. There are currently around 180 volunteers registered or active, and although no accurate figures of the

numbers of volunteers were kept prior to the project, it is estimated that there were around 70 before.

Two problems have been encountered so far with this project. Firstly, the funding for the post of Volunteer Development Project Officer is ‘soft funding’ which has to be sought out each year and due to limited resources this means that the post is not full-time.

The second problem has been around staff liaison with the Volunteer Development Officer. Despite the general enthusiasm for the volunteer projects it has proven difficult to get some members of staff to conform to the new procedures. As the post of *Volunteer Development Project Officer* is relatively junior we have found that it needs the support of senior members of staff in order to succeed.

However, the Undergraduate Learning Officer has had a significant impact by supporting and guiding the Volunteer Officer, providing management for the project and placing volunteer activity into the wider learning context of the museum, university and CETL-AURS. By conceptualising volunteer work as part of our broader learning remit as a university museum; we have been able to create an innovative project which is of benefit to students, the wider community, the heritage sector and the university.

3. Impact and Consequences

3.1 How many students (and at what level and in which programme areas) has this L&T enhancement project impacted on?

Current active student volunteers 56

Current active non-student volunteers 26

In addition there are a further 100 volunteers (student and non-student) registered on the database who are interested in volunteering if a project arises, and who we keep informed of projects and news.

3.2 Has this project positively contributed to the teaching environment and satisfaction of the academic staff delivering this provision?

By centralising the training and administration of volunteers, staff have been alleviated of the time consuming responsibility of overseeing this activity.

It has also allowed staff to undertake projects that they would not have previously considered as they did not feel that they had the expertise and time to administer the necessary volunteer workforce.

This project has also been used as a means of marketing the university to potential students and as a means of drawing in new non-student volunteers.

The current volunteer numbers show that volunteers make up approximately 1.0 FTE over a year thus creating a valuable resource for the museum and supporting the efforts of museum staff.

3.3 Summarise the unforeseen consequences of this project

Many volunteers are engaging with collections in other ways e.g. taking formally taught modules, applying for UROP placements, and bringing in friends and family. This has been facilitated by the involvement of the Undergraduate Learning Officer in volunteer training, the development of new modules (see project UMAC01/02) and the UROP scheme (see project ID02).

We have developed links with the regional agency for museums, libraries and archives on workforce development with proposed joint bid for funding, and will soon be providing training to other museums in the South East on volunteer development. We are working also on a scheme where our students can be sent out to other museums in the local area.

4. Dissemination

4.1 Log dissemination activities relating to this L&T Project.

Date	Main Audience	Type	Dissemination activity
Sept 06	International University Museums Staff	Information	Paper at ICOM UMAC conference in Mexico City (published on website)
Ongoing	UoR academics	Awareness	Publication in University Bulletin
Dec 06	Eden Project & RHS Rosemoor	Information	Advice on garden project
Feb 07	National academics and Careers advisors	Awareness	CCMS conference on Careers Skills Management
Feb 07	CMAC	Awareness	Reports to Committee on Museums and Collections for University of Reading
Ongoing	Potential students and parents	Awareness	Advertising volunteering opportunities at department visit days
Ongoing	students	Awareness/ Information	A range of careers events
Ongoing	Reading Volunteer Centre	Information	Ongoing liaison meetings

In addition to these dissemination activities a range of advertising activities are also undertaken, including ongoing e-mails on projects, ongoing advertisement for specific projects through the Volunteer Centre, the monthly newsletter "The Volunteer", and ongoing distribution of posters via department secretaries.

4.2 Beyond this evaluation, do you see any scope for pedagogic research in this area of learning?

In the next phase of the MERL branch of CETL-AURS we plan to apply for funding to employ a research assistant who will help the *Undergraduate Learning Officer* compile existing evaluation data for the purpose of a pedagogical research paper on collections based learning for Undergraduates.

There is also the possibility of publishing some work specifically on employability as part of the CCMS project.

Project Developer's names:

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