HLF invests further £250,000 in creating work placements

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced further investment of £270,000 in collections skills training across Northern Ireland through its Skills for the Future programme.

It follows the same amount of investment in 2010 and expands HLF's popular tailored skills programme at a time when demand for training and employment opportunities is high. The money will deliver 12 new paid trainee posts in our museums for people seeking to build a career or retrain in the heritage sector. The scheme will be overseen by the Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) acting as the lead partner on behalf of NIMC and the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI). Funding has also been awarded to CIBT-ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland to create further placements in construction skills.

The funding will not only support the trainees to develop their museum and other essential skills, but will also ensure there are people with the correct skills and experience to address the fundamental need to ensure Northern Irelands museum collections are cared for.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "HLF has been overwhelmed by the demand to these programmes. Last year 252 applications were received for internships with only 12 positions available. Two thirds of the interns have now secured either full time or part time employment in the sector as a direct result of participating in the programme. There is a demonstrable need and demand for skills training within our sector and we are pleased to be championing paid work-based placements, particularly in the current economic climate."

Skills for the Future offers funding to develop work-based training in a wide range of skills that are needed to look after buildings, landscapes, habitats, species, and museum and archive collections, as well as equipping people to lead education and outreach programmes, manage volunteers and use new technology. Its focus is on vocational learning, helping meet the skills shortages identified by heritage bodies, and on encouraging potential trainees from all walks of life. Trainees will learn how to get families, schools and communities involved with their heritage, bringing heritage sites and collections alive for the next generation.

One person to benefit from the first CSI training placement was 26 year old Kathryn Anderson from Belfast who completed her internship with Mid-Antrim Museums Service, working across all their sites. She has since secured employment with NMNI at the Ulster Museum:

"The CSI programme was a fantastic opportunity for me to gain training and, moreover, practical experience in the aspects of museum work that I wasn't able to get during my university studies. I was able to complete formal training in collection care and collection management, while simultaneously working for a museum service and being integrally involved in projects such as review of the conditions of stores across the service and websites for two of the museums. The bursary has provided me with much needed experience for gaining employment in the heritage sector."

Others who completed last year's internship include 29 year old Nicola Farrell from Kesh, County Fermanagh, who

completed her placement with Fermanagh County Museum:

“The Collections Skills Initiative provided an excellent insight into current thinking and best practice in a wide variety of museum-related areas. It has helped me to develop my understanding of museum management, and introduced me to the skills involved in storing, handling and displaying museum artefacts.”

26 year old Shane McGivern from Dundalk who did his internship with Newry and Mourne Museum said: “Participating on the CSI has been an amazing experience and the programme far exceeded my expectations.”

The programme is primarily relevant to the museums sector although collections in any heritage sector would benefit from this level of skills training which will address Caring for Collections, Collections Management and Collections Interpretation and research.

Chris Bailey, NIMC’s Director, said: “We are delighted to have secured this funding. Working with our partners in the National Museums Northern Ireland, it will enable us to deliver another phase in the eminently successful Collections Skills Initiative. Ensuring that the museum curators of tomorrow are highly skilled is a key aspect of making the sector sustainable, and an investment that will further protect our heritage for the enjoyment of this and future generations.”

Our first programme brought lasting and positive changes for all involved. The host museums involved in the scheme, gained from having the fresh ideas of a new generation and important work with their collection was completed, when required resources were previously unavailable. The trainees gained because they were provided with the opportunity to work alongside experienced curators and were provided with a thorough grounding in the practical skills needed to enable them to be best placed to follow a career in the sector”.

A survey by NIMC of museums collections in Northern Ireland highlighted a number of challenges facing museums with regard to collections care and management, namely: A lack of accredited conservators based in Northern Ireland; a lack of baseline data with regard to the condition of objects; a high level of documentation backlogs; museum stores nearing capacity; and barriers facing museums regarding research into their collections – primarily lack of time and resource.

The importance of these skills has been highlighted in the house of Commons Committee of Public accounts report on collections Management in the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland (Third report of session 2006-07).

The closing date for CSI applications is 27 June 2012. For more information visit the NIMC website.

Note to editors

Launched in July 2009, Skills for the Future is an HLF programme supporting organisations across the UK to create new training places. HLF has invested £960,100 in Skills for the Future projects based in Northern Ireland and awarded grants totalling £26.8m across the UK under this programme enabling high-quality work-based training, the development of new qualifications and capacity building in the sector.

Further information

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