Changing lives: Samantha's journey from trainee to



Samantha Bannerman recalls how an traineeship supported by HLF's Skills for the Future programme allowed her to break into the heritage sector.

After working in various jobs from a pub to a call centre, at the age of 21 I wanted to get back into education.

It was during my degree at Dundee University that I developed a keen interest in history and started thinking about a career in the heritage sector. I had the passion and interpersonal skills and the work looked diverse, valuable and rewarding. But the sector also appeared to be a closed world. Coming from a working-class background I did not know anyone who worked in heritage and, from what I was reading, there was an expectation to volunteer or accept unpaid internships.

Throughout my degree I had been working 25 hours a week in a local call centre to support myself so it was impossible to get a foot in the door through voluntary experience. I was eager to work but the internship opportunities I came across were unpaid. I considered the post-graduate qualification but didn't have voluntary or paid experience and I wasn't keen on taking out another student loan. Although I was ambitious and desperate to work in heritage, I was stuck in the call centre.

An opportunity not to be missed

One evening at work I was chatting to a colleague about career options and he told me about some one-year paid museum traineeships advertised online. When I got home I read through all the details and one opportunity in particular caught my eye: the Collections Intern position at the Black Watch Castle and Museum in Perth.

Having studied military history and used the archive at the museum for my coursework, I knew that this was a fantastic opportunity. The Collections Internship, supported through HLF's Skills for the Future, would allow me to develop museum skills, there was no requirement to have volunteered in a museum before, it came with a £15,000 bursary and the application process was partly means tested – I felt I was in with a chance!

I put an application together, stressing the fact that I had such a keen interest in heritage but had been unable to pursue this interest further due to work commitments. A few weeks later I read on the BBC website that the programme had received 3,200 applications for 20 places. My heart sank. There were so many people in my position!

It was therefore a big surprise to be invited to an interview, and even more of a surprise when I was offered a role.

Skills for the Future

Being based in the museum full time meant that my development was comprehensive. As part of a structured programme, as well as gaining skills in collections care and documentation, I worked front of house, supported the outreach team and played a leading role in museum events. I was definitely part of the team. I was supported by a dedicated supervisor, museum team and by Museums Galleries Scotland who arranged a series of trainee workshops throughout the year.

After the training, I continued to work at the museum for three months before applying for the post of Curator at the St Andrews Preservation Trust Museum. At the interview, I was able to talk about the variety of practical skills I had developed in such a short time. This definitely swung the interview in my favour and I was delighted to be offered the position.

> "I believe it is so important for there to be a diverse workforce and a variety of routes into the sector. Everyone, regardless of their background, should have the chances that I had."
>
> - Samantha

That was over three years ago now. Working as the only full-time member of staff in a small but busy museum with a large pool of volunteers has definitely been rewarding. The role has allowed me to build on the wide range of skills that I developed during the traineeship, and I confidently manage people, projects and programmes. I feel so fortunate to work in a sector where I am constantly learning and developing new skills and it all started through the Skills for the





Samantha putting her curating skills into practice Colin Hattersley