



Interim Evaluation of Skills for the Future, Cohort 1: Trainee case studies

Oliver Jackson, 2014

Methodology

The case studies aimed to showcase trainee stories from across the HLF Skills for the Future programme, for use by the heritage sector in advocacy work. They highlight how the projects have generated lasting outcomes for a small sample of trainees who have completed a Skills for the Future training placement to date.

Sampling approach

We used starter and exit survey data (compiled in-house by the HLF Skills for the Future programme manager) to develop a primary and matched reserve sample that reflects the range of the Skills for the Future grantees. We adopted a purposive approach, selecting case studies representing 'good practice' in training across a variety of heritage areas and regions of the UK.

To do this, we first filtered the exit survey responses using the following exclusion criteria:

- Trainees who did not give their consent for data to be used;
- Trainees who finished less than six months before the report was compiled;
- Trainees who did not respond to the question that they would recommend the traineeship to a friend, or did respond and would not;
- Trainees who at the time of exit interview, had not secured a job in heritage or a heritage-related training course¹; and
- Trainees who did not provide a contact telephone number.

This exclusion process left a short-list of 56 trainees. We cross-referenced these results with the corresponding data from the starter survey responses to select a sample satisfying the following criteria:

- Geographical spread (including two from Scotland, two from Wales, and one from Northern Ireland);
- Mix of heritage sectors and activities;
- Mix of age, gender and ethnicity;
- Mix of educational backgrounds.

There were only five trainees in the exit survey responses from Northern Ireland, only one of which completed the traineeship more than six months ago. As a result we altered our inclusion criteria for the matched reserve – including a case study of a trainee who completed the traineeship two months ago, but who met the other criteria.

Methodology

We developed ten case studies by conducting semi-structured interviews by telephone with:

- The trainee; and
- Their current employer; or
- Their mentor, supervisor or manager during the traineeship.

We developed separate topic guides for each of the interviewee types to ensure the discussions answered the key research questions. Where we were unable to engage a selected trainee, we approached the reserve.

Summary of activities

We successfully conducted interviews with two people for each of the 10 case studies, for a total of 20 interviews. The ten case studies form the content of the rest of this report.

¹ It is not an explicit aim of the Skills for the Future programme that trainees secure jobs following the time-limited placement. The focus of Skills for the Future projects is to build capacity within the heritage sector to develop and deliver high quality work-based training.

Helen Dickinson

Project: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Nature Counts



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Helen completed a Master's degree in Biodiversity and Conservation in October 2011, and then volunteered at a Wildlife Trust undertaking practical conservation work to develop more practical experience. When she heard of the Skills for the Future traineeship six months later, it came as a welcome opportunity to further develop her specialist knowledge.

“It was a unique opportunity – fitted what I was looking for. The traineeship RSPB were offering was to develop a taxonomic specialism in an under-recorded group. Since my Master's I've always been interested in invertebrates and they wanted a focus on this in the traineeship. I don't think there's any other opportunities like this – getting paid while developing a specialism. It's a stepping stone, having not been successful in getting paid work.”

Participants' experience of the traineeship

Helen took up the position of Trainee Ecologist at the RSPB in April 2012. The role was varied. The main focus was on visiting RSPB reserves and undertaking beetle surveys. This involved surveying the habitat, collecting samples of beetles, identifying them under a microscope, and developing a species list for that group for the reserve. Helen would then make recommendations on habitat management and how the environment can better accommodate rare species. The role also included teaching school groups and writing pieces for the RSPB Scotland blog.

Her work experience was supported by a programme of on-the-job accredited training, covering the identification of taxonomic groups, habitat management, leading workshops and environmental education.

“Personally I used it as a way to jump on to as many training courses as possible – trying to make the most of it!”

Taking part in the traineeship led to a range of benefits. For Helen, the most important among these was the experience and skills developed through being a trusted member of the ecology team.

“I was treated as any other member of the team and integrated into the workplace as you would be if you had a normal job... so I think I gained experience of being within a working ecology team which is a good stepping stone for going into the workplace.”

“Being given responsibility – ‘can you go to this reserve and tell us what’s happening’ – being allowed to go out there and do it yourself, I think that was a really good thing to have and it gives you confidence in your abilities to be an employee and not just a trainee.”

The bursary was crucial to enabling Helen to relocate to Edinburgh to take up the opportunity.

Next steps

Towards the end of the traineeship, Helen was offered support with writing CVs and interview techniques, as well as job application advice which continued after the traineeship.

“It’s always good to have somebody else’s perspective on CVs and personal statements – someone who has employed people before.”

At the time of writing, Helen worked for the Scottish Wildlife Trust, monitoring the impact of unlicensed beavers on Tayside. This role involves trapping the animals to record health and genetic information. It also involves working with landowners to document problems caused by the beavers and working to resolve conflicts by trialling measures to mitigate the problems caused. Helen thought her experience as a Skills for the Future trainee prepared her well for this role.

“Because I was doing a lot of survey work on RSPB reserves, you have to do a fair bit of liaison with site staff to coordinate what you were going to do, and offer advice on habitat management. The job gave me the confidence to deal with people in a higher position than myself and deal with them confidently.”

Simon Jones, Helen’s manager at the Scottish Wildlife Trust, agreed that experience in liaising with stakeholders was key to her appointment ahead of over 50 other candidates, adding that:

“We had a very strong field – a lot of interest. We selected Helen because of her manner... within a project which is quite high profile it’s important not to charge in and appear to have all the answers.”

Already, her ecological and inter-personal skills are having an impact on her new organisation.

“It’s good to have somebody with a range of ecological skills and not just a specialist in one thing. We’ve seen the benefits of that. Someone who knows how an environmental NGO works but can also deal with landowners, get permissions and gain their trust.”

While not being directly relevant to her current role, Helen has been able to maintain her specialism in invertebrates: this has included undertaking some beetle identification to support a postdoctoral student, and a temporary contract with the RSPB to conduct a bumblebee survey. She continues to develop this interest in her spare time, using her own microscopes.

Overall, Helen really valued her traineeship for the experience she developed and for kick-starting her career in conservation.

“It was a really unique opportunity and I think it was a real stepping stone to getting me to where I am now. Pretty essentially to my career path and I would certainly recommend it – loads of people should do it!”

Tania Dron

Project: Building Curatorial and Learning Skills for the Heritage Sector, Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Tania knew she wanted to break into heritage education, but felt that her qualifications did not meet the criteria. Prior to making the application, Tania was applying her passion for heritage and performance in a part-time role as a tour guide in Edinburgh. With a longstanding personal interest in Scottish history, she saw the Skills for the Future traineeship as her route into a dream career.

Participants' experience of the traineeship

Tania's traineeship was hosted by RCAHMS for one year, and involved a range of work activities alongside a programme of accredited training. Her projects included making heritage resources available online and developing education materials and tours for school groups. She contributed to websites, wrote online learning resources and developed an exhibition.

While busy contributing to these education and outreach activities, Tania also worked towards an accredited qualification tailored to her development needs. Delivered through work-based training and online learning, Tania's course covered topics specific to outreach work in an archives setting. She was able to apply this learning directly to her work.

The traineeship had a range of positive impacts, but first among these for Tania was the network of contacts she was able to develop.

"Contacts, definitely – meeting people in the industry. We had several opportunities going to events, or hosting them ourselves – people in the industry were very excited about the traineeship and keen to meet us. It gave us that introduction to people – that foot in the door."

The placement also developed practical skills in writing and presenting, as well as a better understanding of heritage education.

Next steps

Towards the end of the placement, Tania was given support in finding her next role in the sector through CV advice and mock interviews, as well as practical support in searching for jobs.

She secured a job as Learning Officer with the National Trust for Scotland, based at the Battle of Bannockburn site. Her role matches her experiences on the traineeship. There is high demand for school visits to the site, so Tania leads workshops and drop-in sessions for groups of children from

nursery to senior secondary level, sharing her knowledge about medieval life. She is also responsible for training and managing volunteers. With a new centre due to open at the time of writing at the Battle of Bannockburn site, Tania is involved in an exciting 700th anniversary year.

Her manager at the site, Calum Price, described the range of skills required of a successful applicant to the Learning Officer post:

“We were looking for someone with direct experience of working with the public, specific experience of working with schools and young people, and a good knowledge of the current curriculum.”

The traineeship played a key role, in Calum’s view, to giving Tania a route into heritage.

“To get into learning in the heritage sector is pretty tough... The Skills for the Future project is massively helpful for people to break into the sector – it gives them that access point to gain experience and get that hands-on direct experience so that when going into interviews, they can say that they’ve done it.”

He went on to describe how the experience has enabled her to carry out her role:

“She has excellent delivery skills – I have no qualms about her going out and delivering workshops with a whole range of audiences. She really understands what’s required so she’s been great for the training role as well. She has a keen interest in drama, a big interest in that period of history... she can wield a sword with the best of them!”

Tania agreed that the experienced gained was essential to securing the role.

“I’d like to think I’d still be where I am [without the traineeship], but I’m not sure if that’s realistic! ... It boosted my confidence, and helped me develop my skills.”

Looking back, Tania would recommend the experience to anyone.

“It was an excellent experience – I felt really privileged to be chosen. It was a fantastic opportunity and I know that people volunteer in the sector for many years to get that foot in the door – I was given that opportunity and was paid to do so.”

Nicola Hesketh-Roberts

Project: Conservation Skills Programme, Dorset Wildlife Trust



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Nicola's commitment to working in the heritage sector has been with her for years.

'At the age of 10 I did a conservation project on my local area so yes I have always been interested in conservation'.

After graduating from a degree in Countryside Management in 2003 despite finding it difficult to move into the heritage sector she persisted doing volunteer work in her spare time as a field surveyor. She also spent some time working in offices to pay the bills. Nicola took a job with the Dorset Wildlife Trust in an admin role which added another dimension to her knowledge of the sector.

It was through Nicola's work at the Dorset Wildlife Trust that she heard about the opportunity to do a traineeship. She jumped at the chance to gain some more practical experience. To work as a wildlife warden you need a range of licences to be able to carry out certain tasks, such as using a chainsaw.

"I was faced with around £500-£700 of licences that I needed to get jobs I wanted and there was no way I could afford that without help from the bursary" so the traineeship was an "amazing opportunity to get more practical experience".

Participants' experience of the traineeship

Nicola's traineeship was mainly spent on the East Dorset Nature Reserve but she spent time on other sites across Dorset too. Nicola shadowed two wardens who managed the habitat in these areas and during her time she undertook a wide range of activities.

"I did loads of different jobs like installing gates for new cattle on heathland, spraying bracken and tree cutting."

She also managed volunteers and gained experience of undertaking surveys. This was exactly the kind of experience that Nicola had been expecting and she enjoyed the combination of working with others but also having some autonomy over her work. She was entrusted with the warden's role when they were away and found this experience very rewarding.

"It was great- I got to do everything when they were away on holiday which gave me a real experience of what it would be like to be a warden."

Nicola gained qualifications in chainsaw, pesticides, using a buzz cutter, first aid and clearing during her traineeship. Gaining these licences was vital and she felt that they were well integrated into her work.

'It gave me the confidence that I needed to do the job.'

This new found confidence can be credited to the support and motivation of the wardens. She notes that they went out of their way to support her when she found things difficult. Skills for the Future allowed Nicola to gain skills and a depth of understanding that wouldn't have been possible without the traineeship.

Without the help of this traineeship and the bursary Nicola would have still been volunteering and hoping to get a more permanent job in the sector. For Nicola the traineeship was a "one in a million opportunity".

Next steps

Nicola, at the time of writing, works as a Senior Countryside Warden for the Countryside Service. She initially started the post in March 2013 on a six month contract. This was then extended until January 2014 in line with new funding provided by DEFRA and Natural England. She works specifically on a marsh nature reserve and other sites as needed.

Day to day Nicola runs an information centre, liaises with visitors, leads educational work, patrols the site, carries out biological surveys and works on mapping flora. She also undertakes the practical management of the reserve.

The skills that Nicola gained during her time with the Dorset Wildlife Trust have been absolutely vital to her current role. She has used her practical experience of using a chainsaw and buzz cutter as well as her experience of managing volunteers and undertaking surveys.

Her current employer reported that:

'She often goes beyond her official duty both in terms of time spent at work but also in her enthusiasm'.

Nicola's traineeship allowed her to compete with others applying for the role but "really it was her personality and confidence that got her the job."

Halima Khanom

Project: Cultural Co-operation, Strengthening Our Common Life by Nurturing Heritage Skills



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Halima undertook a 12 month traineeship in 2012 with Cultural Co-operation and during this time largely worked at the Royal Geographical Society (RGS).

Before her traineeship Halima had completed an undergraduate degree in History and Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London. She had done some voluntary youth work and been involved with historical exhibitions at Goldsmiths, which first gave the idea she might want to work in the heritage sector.

The traineeship caught Halima's attention as a "really good graduate opportunity" and a chance to follow up these interests.

"I was always interested in cultural history and had done some primary research during my degree."

Halima wanted an opportunity that would give her a broad introduction to the sector and when the careers service at Goldsmiths drew the traineeship to her attention was keen to apply.

Participants' experience of the traineeship

Halima worked in the Education and Collections Departments at the RGS setting up exhibitions and assisting in the marketing and community engagement work of the team. She worked with community groups as well as corporate organisations to engage them in the exhibitions. Part of this work involved the development of online collections and cataloguing and running the reading rooms and the Picture Library. She worked with children and adults, teaching them about the collections.

"I did so many things which was great so I was really allowed to choose what I was interested in."

During her traineeship she gained a Level 3 Diploma in Cultural Heritage assessed by the Victoria and Albert Museum. She built up a sizable portfolio and completed ad hoc training opportunities, including a project management course.

All in all "the traineeship gave me first-hand experience of working in the sector and met all my expectations".

Next steps

Following her placement, Halima secured a role at the Museum of London as a Community Collaboration Assistant and began a sponsored part-time Master's Degree in Heritage Studies at the University of East London and Birkbeck College. Her Skills for the Future Traineeship inspired her to apply for the position at the Museum of London: her time at The Royal Geographical Society confirmed to her that she wanted to specialise in maps and mapping. Without her experience of the traineeship she says she would not have been able to find a job in heritage.

“Without this traineeship I might have never ended up in heritage or developed the skills that have taken me to the Museum and now I am considering doing a PhD!”

The Royal Geographic Society felt that it was important to encourage new entrants into the sector and engage more Black and minority ethnic communities with its work. Halima's community engagement activity contributed to this important overall goal.

Caroline Pudney

Project: Community Archaeology Bursary programme, The Council for British Archaeology

Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Caroline has a long-standing interest in heritage. Before applying for the traineeship she had completed a PhD in archaeology and worked for a spell as a university researcher. Her ambition was to find a role that would allow her to share her love for the subject with others. The Skills for the Future traineeship offered the opportunity to develop her skills and help her achieve this career goal.

“I had the archaeology skills but wanted to gain outreach and engagement skills – project management and running outreach engagement projects.”

Participants’ experience of the traineeship

Caroline’s traineeship was with the The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) but she was based within Cadw, the Welsh Government’s historic environment service. Her role included a wide range of responsibilities over 12 months – preparing school education plans, writing project designs, managing budgets, visiting sites and monuments, and meeting with local history societies and other stakeholders across the sector.

She was given a high level of responsibility and freedom from the outset, including managing events at the Festival of Archaeology and contributing to Cadw’s long-term strategy by developing the Community Archaeology Framework for Wales.

“I was thrown in at the deep end, which was daunting, but the support was always there and it was learning on the job which was fantastic. I was given a lot more freedom than I expected to get on with things and make projects my own. The mentoring was brilliant.”

Caroline’s manager at Cadw, Polly Groom, thought that allowing the trainees this supported independence, and allowing them to develop contacts across different departments, was key to the success of the traineeship.

“We were able to give her space. We gave her a line manager in the same branch and then a mentor in a different one – public engagement and learning – so she was able to sit between two branches. She was able to develop her own project and her own ideas.”

While carrying out this work Caroline was undertaking work-based training towards an NVQ Level 3 qualification in Archaeological Practice. In particular the units on project management, writing project designs, health and safety, and risk assessment gave her some practical knowledge and skills that she had not developed during her previous studies. The benefits were:

“Being much more aware of the pitfalls of doing things and the possible complications that can pop up – child protection, the budget, health and safety, communication.”

“The skills to manage projects and people from all walks of life; the knowledge and the insight into the historic environment in Wales and how it all works; and the confidence to run projects and crack on with things.”

The traineeship helped her to develop a network of contacts across Wales – within the heritage sector as well as statutory bodies such as child protection and local community groups. Caroline also developed a new perspective on the heritage sector and a new way to communicate her love of archaeology.

“Initially I wanted to lecture... it’s nice to enthuse people with the stuff I love. [But] the outreach work is a version of teaching ... This [project] has showed that it’s good to do this with anyone and everyone – from little primary school kids to people in their sixties, seventies – from all backgrounds.”

Next steps

As the traineeship came to a close, Caroline was taken on for a further two years by TCBA, seconded to Cadw, to continue her varied work to support community archaeology in Wales. This included developing the Community Archaeology Framework for Wales. This has enabled Cadw to achieve closer links with other areas of government policy, such as around building the aspirations and interests of young people.

She has also been able to promote heritage to people from a range of backgrounds, through community archaeology projects with groups as diverse as prisoners and looked after children.

The quality of the Skills for the Future traineeship and the skills and experience she developed were central to Caroline being employed full time.

“I wouldn’t have been able to do this without the traineeship. The knowledge of the sector; the knowledge of the way community groups function and work within Wales; the Welsh Government’s priorities in funding... without the skills I developed I wouldn’t now be leading on a bid that focussed on youth engagement, I wouldn’t be designing the community archaeology framework, I wouldn’t be consulting on ministerial statements.”

For Caroline’s manager at Cadw, Polly, the experience of hosting Caroline and her fellow community archaeology trainees was transformative.

“We already knew there was a value [to community archaeology] but [Caroline] dramatically raised our capacity to deliver on it without a doubt. She’s been able to put a lot of energy into it, so she’s increased our awareness as well.”

The positive experience of hosting the trainees and the contributions made by Caroline resulted in her being offered the extended contract.

“It was clear to us that [after the traineeship ended] what we couldn’t do was just back out and say ‘we can’t do community archaeologists’ – we wanted to strengthen our capacity in that area. So there was a gap we had to work out how to fill... Caroline was a good candidate with really directly relevant experiences... who could hit the ground running.”

Caroline’s experiences have strengthened her commitment to working in the heritage sector and she is keen to further develop her career in archaeology.

Caspar Joel Rice

Project: Foundations in Heritage: learning core heritage skills in the workplace in West Wales, Carmarthenshire County Council

Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Caspar was coming to the end of a NVQ Level 3 in Carpentry when his course tutor told him about the Skills for the Future programme. The idea of learning heritage techniques was immediately appealing, and so the Foundations in Heritage traineeship at Carmarthenshire County Council seemed an ideal opportunity to apply his carpentry skills to a career in heritage.

“I was interested in the old heritage ways, like the old ways people made trusses; the skills and the better craftsmanship.”

Participants’ experience of the Skills for the Future traineeship

Caspar’s 12-month traineeship involved placements at a range of companies alongside a formal training programme, to develop the skills and experience necessary to enter the sector. This included a placement with a heritage roofing company, where he worked on heritage timber framing and the conversion of a chapel into a new theatre; and a traditional building company working on a range of listed buildings.

Alongside these projects Caspar worked towards evidencing the requirements of the qualification NVQ Level 3 Carpenter for Heritage, supplementing his general trade knowledge. Supported by training sessions arranged by Carmarthenshire County Council on carpentry skills, including heavy lifting and heavy oak framing, Caspar also studied conservation values. Caspar welcomed the training, and in particular the responsibility he was given by host organisations:

“Teachers were brilliant, the courses were really good.” “[The host organisations] let you do it on your own, they didn’t use you as free labour – they let you do what you want and it gives you confidence.”

Caspar found the traineeship stimulating and felt that learning the heritage aspects of carpentry has improved his all-round skills as a trades person.

“I found it really interesting. It’s different from normal carpentry – normal carpentry is more just the craft and skills you’d learn from the trade. I learned more in that year [of the traineeship] than in the two years of my apprenticeship. It has 110% made me a better carpenter.”

Caspar’s manager on the traineeship, Helena Burke, saw wider benefits. Alongside the heritage knowledge and carpentry skills, Helena noted a real boost in confidence over the length of the traineeship and an improved awareness of how to present at interviews.

Next steps

Towards the end of the traineeship, Caspar took part in sessions aimed to support the trainees in finding work: mock interviews and advice sessions on finding opportunities. He found these very useful.

In fact, Caspar was taken on full-time by one of the host organisations he had worked for where he was able to apply the skills he had learned. Unfortunately, six months into the role, he suffered a serious injury outside of work and had to leave the post as a result. Following a period of recovery, Caspar found another job. From a choice of three job offers, he chose the company with the closest heritage involvement; he now works as a carpenter across on a range of listed buildings.

Caspar is full of praise for his Skills for the Future traineeship, which has enabled him to develop a career in heritage carpentry.

For Helena, the traineeship was key in securing Caspar employment in the sector: “Developing his confidence, making links in the industry, motivating him and making him understand how important is the work he was doing.”

John Roberts

Project: Chester Renaissance Academy of Heritage Skills, Cheshire West & Chester Council



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

John undertook a traineeship through Cheshire West and Cheshire Council as a Banker Stonemason for 12 months from May 2011. Before undertaking his traineeship John had studied outdoor education at university, but an injury after graduating forced him to reassess his career prospects.

“I was in a real limbo. I wasn’t able to do outdoor education anymore because of my knee.”

After a period of recovery, John was volunteering for a disability charity where he helped to maintain mobility scooters. He had always been fascinated by history and architecture and so when he saw the advert for the Skills for the Future traineeship he decided that it was a great opportunity to start a new career.

Participants’ experience of the traineeship

During his traineeship John worked with four different companies, giving him a range of professional experience. A spell with Manchester-based stonemasons, Mather & Ellis working on the Cunard building in Liverpool introduced him to working on a large building site. He learned how to clean and restore stone and about health and safety regulations before moving to local specialist stonemasons, N. Andrews Stonemasons Limited where he was eventually offered a job.

“I worked on smaller jobs, I did pointing and restoration of brick work as well as banker masonry. I used a wide variety of tools and methods.”

John also worked with Grosvenor Construction, a specialist building conservation company, where he was involved in the conservation of the King Charles Tower and the Water Tower in Chester, and for the Grosvenor Estate, again restoring and cleaning stonework. During this varied year, he achieved his Level 2 City and Guilds qualification in Banker Masonry in Construction.

John thought that the support that he gained was an enormous help to him. Both those co-ordinating the traineeship at the Council, as well as his managers on his placements went out of their way to help and support him. This was particularly true of Paul Valentine who worked for the Council managing the Skills for the Future project.

“He always found time to check up on how I was doing. He picked me up when I was down and even supported me once I was no longer technically still in his care.”

Next steps

At the time of writing John worked for Neil Andrews and was studying one day a week for his Level 3 Banker Mason qualification.

“I asked Neil if he would take me on at the end of my traineeship. He was hugely supportive and agreed.”

John is the only person in the firm with banker mason skills and so takes the lead in creating new pieces of stonework. He also works fixing stonework and has developed the skills to carry out the range of tasks required of the role. This has included repairing and rebuilding brickwork as well as stone.

His manager Neil commented that “John is a natural banker mason; he took to it really well, is reliable and a fast learner- a great team player.”

Of the Skills for the Future programme, Neil thought that: “the traineeship has been great in encouraging a younger generation to take up banker masonry. We need more trainees entering into the trade.”

Without this opportunity, John thought he would still have been unemployed. He hopes that in the future he can move into teaching to pass on his knowledge and skills. John felt inspired by those had worked with during the traineeship commenting:

“It would be great to share my skills and experience in the future. My tutor at college was a master mason and he knew the answer to every question. The help and support I had was absolutely fantastic. I will never forget it.”

Tamsin Rowe

Project: Nurturing Worcestershire's Treasures and Skills for the Future Worcestershire County Council



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Tamsin undertook her 12-month traineeship between August 2011 and September 2012 at Worcestershire County Council in Worcester Cathedral Library.

Before undertaking her traineeship she was not in full-time work and was freelancing following the completion of a PhD in Modern and Medieval history at Exeter University. Tamsin had a strong academic background but little practical work experience.

“From about the age of 15 or 16 I had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to go into Heritage” but “What I needed was some concrete practical experience to get into heritage work.”

Participants' experience of the traineeship

During her traineeship at the Cathedral Library, Tamsin was involved in four exhibitions, contributed to research and helped to interpret manuscripts. She also gained experience of label writing and improved her public speaking skills: during the traineeship she ran tours of the library which she felt increased her competence.

She was also encouraged by the amount of freedom she had to follow her interests “I had a lot of flexibility to choose activities which gave me a lot of experience doing curatorial work”.

During her traineeship she gained a Certificate in Heritage Management from the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust. This gave her more experience of the business side of heritage work and meant she could develop new skills in data analysis.

“The traineeship was more comprehensive than I had thought it might be. I particularly enjoyed the site visit to the British Library. It was good to build up new networks in the sector.”

Next steps

Tamsin secured a job with the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust as Curatorial Officer, Collections Development, a position funded by the Arts Council as part of its Renaissance programme.

Without her practical experience, her current manager would “not have been able to see her potential over and above the other candidates who applied to the role.”

Tamsin plays an integral role within the organisation and works across several sites. Her role involves “Developing collections in the most meaningful, cost effective and significant way that we can.”

Day to day she is “writing text for exhibitions; working hands on conserving exhibition items; helping better document collections... assessing the significance of objects in the collection and those for disposal... It has a strong curatorial element.”

Tamsin has settled into her new role well and feels that without the traineeship she would not have been able to get into this job. The skills she learnt during her traineeship directly relate to the current work she does now and she felt that it was a “*fantastic experience- it really helped me in my career*”.

Her current manager noted that we could “see the next generation of cultural leaders and senior workers in heritage” come out of these Skills for the Future traineeships.

Stephen Unsworth

Project: Heritage Engineering Skills, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Stephen undertook a traineeship at Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums for 12 months between the May 2011 and April 2012. Stephen had been unemployed from June 2009- 2012 but had previously worked as an audio visual co-ordinator at a local college from 1993.

Stephen heard about the traineeship through a friend who had been doing a similar programme in sign writing who encouraged him saying "You're interested in those kinds of things. You should give it a go!"

"I had some experience of engineering and vehicle maintenance for motorbikes and when I left school rather a long time ago I studied electrical engineering at college but I hadn't done any serious mechanical engineering for a long, long time."

Skills for the Future traineeship allowed Stephen to turn a hobby into a career.

Participants' experience of the traineeship

At the beginning of his traineeship Stephen was thrown into project work including the manufacture of a modified bearing for locomotive as well as work on the last remaining locomotive of its type used on the North Pennines lines. He found this work extremely rewarding and said that "It was a big achievement to see it finished".

He worked on the restoration of a locomotive that had been stored in the museum but had not been in full working order. As a result of his work it is now fully functioning and used regularly in demonstrations at the museum.

During his training he did courses on smithing and foundry work and built up a portfolio to be shown to future employers. This included detailed records of the projects along with photographs and drawings.

"One thing I particularly enjoyed was the project work that came in, restoring vehicles or engines and the different techniques involved in that...plus I learnt a lot through the taster days."

During his traineeship Stephen obtained a Health and Safety qualification as well as a Level 3 qualification in Mechanical Manufacturing Engineering.

"I wasn't really sure what to expect. I was a little worried because of the change from my regular work but once I got into it I thought, ok, this is actually beneficial."

Next steps

Stephen still works as a volunteer at the museum where he undertook his traineeship and runs the locomotive demonstrations. He has also secured a job working as a mechanical engineering technician at Middlesbrough College, where he prepares materials for student use, strips components from machines, and helps out with the day to day running of the workshops.

"I would have never considered going back into this work as I thought I was, for want of a better term, past it" but the traineeship gave him the confidence to get back into work after a period of unemployment.

During his traineeship he had a lot of career support which helped him to gain his current role and it was this confidence that meant he did well at interview.

"I think one of the main reasons I got the job was because of my work on the bursary scheme."

Kerrill Winters

Project: Collection Skills Initiative NI, Northern Ireland Museums Council



Background: applying for the Skills for the Future traineeship

Kerrill Winters had long held an ambition to work in heritage, but struggled to develop enough practical experience to get a foot in the door of a traditionally highly competitive sector. Following a Master's degree in Museum Studies in 2009, Kerrill spent more than a year volunteering at the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) gaining experience in the curatorial department, alongside a number of other jobs to pay the bills.

"[Skills for the Future] seemed like an excellent opportunity to gain practical training in museums – to get experience as an employee in a large-scale organisation. It was a good place to get started and to secure employment."

Participants' experience of the traineeship

Kerrill was based at the Ulster American Folk Park, an open-air museum near Omagh that explores the historical links between Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

Over the year of the traineeship Kerrill undertook a formal work-based training programme alongside work projects. Study covered the core topics of collections care, collections research, and collections interpretation, leading to a Level 5 Diploma in Cultural Heritage. The training ran alongside daily work, which provided the opportunity to put learning into practice. Most of Kerrill's time was spent gaining hands-on experience of museum work.

"No two days were the same – sometimes responding to queries, other times immersed in the collection. There was exhibition work, and some days I was called out to look at a new acquisition."

Kerrill led a project to document an important archive collection, telling the story of an Irish migrant's transatlantic experience through correspondence with his family back home. He worked to promote it regionally, nationally and internationally – including regular contact with US-based colleagues to exchange information – through presentations and assembling an online exhibition.

His mentor at the NIMC and manager of the traineeship, Clora Gallagher, discussed the important outcomes for heritage brought about as part of Kerrill's work on various projects: the Campbell family archive, a project on the Titanic and the British Museum's Warriors of the Plains exhibition.

In Kerrill's view, the traineeship was particularly valuable in developing practical experience and contacts within the sector.

“Working in the museum sector, the practical working with objects, getting to work on exhibitions and getting to network. I have established firm links I can contact in my work now for help I might need.”

His mentor took the same view:

“It’s all about the practical experience. The reason for the project was so that they could secure an entry-level job – and that was achieved.”

The traineeship and its attached bursary were key to getting Kerrill started in a heritage career – without it, he would have had to reconsider his future options.

“I probably wouldn’t be working in museums – I’d probably be doing something else, looking to retrain. I was having to take up a lot of volunteering posts – at that stage, if I hadn’t done [this], it would have been a change of topic for me.”

The Skills for the Future project benefitted the Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) too, through developing the organisation’s ability to deliver on-the-job training and further develop pathways for new entrants to the workforce. It also strengthened the coaching skills of staff in the participating museums and enhanced partnership working between the organisations involved.

Next steps

NIMC helped trainees to take the next steps in their heritage careers. Towards the end of the placement, trainees took part in a workshop on applying for jobs and participated in mock interviews, with tailored feedback on areas for improvement.

Kerrill used the traineeship as a springboard to further roles in heritage – he was contracted to work on an exhibition project he had contributed to during his time at NIMC, and then took on a role at NMNI as an interpretive guide. At the time of writing he has a full-time role as an Exhibitions Officer at the Novium Museum in Chichester. The training received and practical experience gained from the Skills for the Future traineeship was invaluable in securing these positions.

“I learned exhibition skills, in terms of how museums interpret their objects and collections and the myriad of ways you can do that – using space for your exhibitions and presenting your collections... public speaking and a professional demeanour in how you work with colleagues.”

Kerrill hopes to continue to develop his experience in the museums sector and is grateful for the impact Skills for the Future has had on his career.

“It has been definitely positive for me and I would recommend it to anyone else. It definitely gives you what it says on the tin – skills for the future.”