

Developing a New Education Programme

Developing an education programme sounds like quite a daunting task. You've probably got a stack of questions – what should I put in, will it be relevant, where shall I run it, who should run it, will the schools be interested?

First port of call should be the 5-14 Curriculum. Generally speaking, most museums will be able to find an area which can be utilised to create workshops to fit their collections, displays or general areas of expertise. Copies of the curriculum guidelines can be obtained from your local education authority. There is no overall national curriculum, only guideline areas, and not all places will cover the same topics. Most museums, if they are looking to create history-based workshops, should look at the 5-14 Environmental Studies People in the Past section.

Decide on the format of your workshop. There is no right and wrong way to do things from the outset. Some groups work well with worksheets, others don't. Some classes are happy to be lectured to for the duration of the workshop, others aren't. Be prepared to change the workshop several times until it works. This may seem like hard work but is a necessary route to creating a successful workshop programme that schools will want to visit and hopefully come back to.

A unique resource museums have is our collection. Artefacts can be made available from the handling collection for use in workshops or replicas made. The initial cost outlay for replicas may seem high, but given the fact that they are going to be used repeatedly in subsequent workshops this expense is worthwhile. Handling artefacts, whether real or replica, can add a lot of value to a workshop. Instead of being detached from the object, staring at it through a glass case, the pupils can interact with it, gain an idea of how it feels, how it would function and how it would have been used.

Create a space which you can dedicate to school workshops. If you have a conference room or lecture hall this would be an ideal space for running practical elements of the workshop. Take a look at your galleries and displays and try to work these in to the workshop. Bringing displays to life will liven up a workshop.

Make the workshop fun! There is no point in recreating a classroom environment in the museum – there would be little value in the school coming to your workshops if they could do the exact same thing in their classroom. For example, dressing up is a good fun activity, an excellent way of illustrating an everyday element of the past. Replica costumes can be purchased from a number of suppliers or if you are handy with a needle and thread you can make your own. Again the initial outlay may seem high, but if the costume is going to be used repeatedly this becomes less of an issue over time.

Limit the workshop group to a workable size. Schools often want to bring along more than one class at a time, usually to cut down on the costs of bus hire. If your organisation has the capacity and the staff to deal with more than one class at a time, fine. If not, don't be afraid to tell the schools this. Set a maximum of 33 pupils per workshop. This is the

maximum class size. If teachers are not going to teach above this number they should not expect museums to realistically deliver anything worthwhile to a larger group.

Try to keep the workshops fresh. If possible introduce different elements every so often, whether this be a new activity or a new way of presenting the workshop. This not only makes it more interesting for the schools but will go some way to offsetting workshop-fatigue endured by staff running the same workshops time after time!

Work to your strengths. Concentrate on providing a workshop which your establishment has resources to create and which is relevant to the displays or collections in the museum. It is best to create a high-quality workshop covering subject matters which staff are comfortable giving and has a relevance to the local area. For example, many of the schools teach the Vikings and the Jacobites, and very often request these as workshops. If your museum has no collection or the local area no historical connection to these subjects it is probably best to leave them to others who do.

Test your ideas before launching them on a school. Get colleagues involved, demonstrate what you are proposing, ask them if they think it works, is there anything they think should be added or even taken away. Try to invite teachers along to show them your ideas. A good approach is to invite them along on an in-service training day. Your local education authority will have a list of these. Find out from the teachers what is being taught, show them the resources you have and what you intend to do with them and ask their advice on what they would like to see in a workshop. Teachers have a number of outcomes they have to achieve when teaching a topic and if your workshop covers several of these they will be doubly happy.

Evaluation is crucial to the success of an education programme. Devise an evaluation form for the teachers and at the end of each workshop get them to fill it out and add comments. Do not be afraid to make changes to the workshop based on the teacher's comments. They are the ones teaching the subject and are more aware of how their class reacts to the content of your workshop. At the same time don't go to the other extreme and make every change that teachers come out with.

The workshop can be as expensive as you wish to make it. If you are going to purchase replica objects and costume you will have an initial financial outlay. Grant aid could be sought for covering some of the costs. The Scottish Museums Council are probably the first people to contact when looking for funding for education projects. Their small grants programme might be able to help fund purchase of materials for workshops, and they should be able to advise on other fundraising sources and activities.

Once you have a workshop programme in place you will need to publicise it to the schools and let them know costs, times, what's on offer and how to get to the museum – its surprising how many don't know! Publicity can stretch to producing a leaflet if the budget allows it outlining your workshops, how to book etc, or as simple as a letter to local schools or even a phone call or e-mail. The best publicity your workshops can get is word of mouth. If teachers are happy with the workshops they will tell their colleagues.

Schools often come back for the same workshops each year – the teachers may be the same but the pupils are not.

In summary –

- Consult the curriculum. Find out what the schools are teaching and build workshops around this.
- Test your workshops before launching them full time.
- Play to your strengths and don't try to be all things to everyone.
- Publicise the workshops to schools.
- Evaluate your workshops and don't be afraid to change things.
- Have fun!