

International Training Programme 2012- Final Report

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I was very lucky to join the International Training Programme at the British Museum, from 13 June to 21 July 2012. This program allowed me to gain experience and deepen my knowledge in museology; moreover it helped me understand new aspects of museum missions and curatorial work. I have gained professionally and personally from attending the ITP and would like to thank the British Museum for selecting me and the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Trust for sponsoring me.

Honestly, everything related to this training course is very useful to my museum, 'The Grand Egyptian Museum' [GEM] and to my curatorial work, since the British Museum is one of the most famous museums in Europe. As the GEM is still under construction, and is supposed to be on the highest international standards of the western museum, its staff need such a foundation course, particularly in the areas of design, planning and displays, collections management including object storage, documentation, not to mention conservation methods & scientific techniques as well as public programmes.

I gained a lot of experience, more than I was expecting, from joining the ITP.

Enlightenment of my mind

This program has enlightened my mind concerning the concept of museums. I used to think that the museum is a place where you can see ancient antiquities and enjoy cultural heritage. Working as a curator, I always thinking of the displays. 'What can I do to improve the displays', this was my concern. But after the 40 impressive days I spent on the ITP, I gained new experiences, saw new aspects of museum strategy and many different approaches and perspectives on the role of museums and curatorial work.

- I learnt that the museum is a place for the family as the museums in the UK make children, families, and communities engage in different activities.
- The museum is a place of learning and a research facility. All the museums I have visited whether in London or in Newcastle [Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums was my UK partner placement] have plenty of educational services and learning programmes to engage children and adults to achieve educational goals.
- The museum serves as a popular academic and cultural institution since the museums in the UK acts as intelligent establishments using digital technology to improve the visitors experience.
- The BM is a place for events and communities since the key message of the museum is "A museum of the world for the world"

Improving my work objectives

At GEM I am currently working in a department called "Museum Exhibition and Research". I am involved in displaying the artifacts, working very closely with the design-team, providing them with the basis to create a well-organized series of galleries, suggesting themes and layouts for the museum's galleries, and creating ideas and stories. Additionally we, the

members of the department, are in charge of writing the gallery labels and others levels of text that are to be used in different galleries of GEM.

Undoubtedly this interesting program has deepened my knowledge and enhanced my skills at work, giving me a broader understanding into curatorial work especially in the field of designing exhibitions and displays.

- Attending the ITP made me absorb a lot of **new displays ideas** which I will apply to my museums exhibitions. Working on the basics of putting the artifacts on display, thinking about the **supporting material** and other ways of engaging with the visitors. I learned about the importance of using graphics, photographs, or video to help the visitor to understand the object.
- I learnt about **project management for exhibitions**; how to design an exhibition or permanent exhibition; how it should be managed
- I learnt that **harmony** between the staff is like the magical word. I learnt how the curators, conservators, designers and interpreters arrange their work in sequence. The ITP made me realize the importance of having co-operation and harmony between the staff to fulfill projects in an enjoyable way.
- This interesting course gave me a broader view of the curator's job and it provided me with keys to be a **capable, well-rounded, potential future curator**.

Of course knowledge of basic management for exhibitions and displays are particularly useful for my work, particularly as GEM has temporary exhibitions in its future plans.

There are plenty of areas I have learnt from the BM and TWAM that I am now working to apply in my museum and in my work:

- I am now working on a presentation to all the departments of GEM about the ITP 2012 experience and the new ideas which can be applied.
- I've prepared two workshops and scheduled, in agreement with my manager, a number of sessions based on the ITP courses which I am going to make to the members of my department in order to share my experience and my knowledge.

Session 1

About the permanent gallery in room 64, "Wall paintings from the tomb chapel of Nebamun", to show the meaning of refurbishing a gallery and to highlight what I learnt from the important session I had with Richard Parkinson. It is not about the techniques of rejoining fragments to create a single wall scene or any new display but more, **it has enlighten my mind to gain deeper vision of how I should think.**

GEM has many temples, chapels, and shrines that are going to be reconstructed to exhibit them in the galleries, and this training in general, and that session in particular, taught me many things I will apply it to GEM's exhibitions program:

- I realize it is not about a displayed temple, shrine, or tomb chapel but about **key messages** we should convey to the audience. For example the main aim of gallery 64 was 'how to make the people experience the atmosphere of the original tomb chapel of Nebamun'.

- How to make the audience understand not the paintings (because the BM is **NOT an Art Museum**) but to learn about the lives of both the rich and poor people, and the daily life of ancient Egyptians.
- It makes me realize the importance of having actual objects on display to lead to deeper engagement.
- And how to set a dialogue through the gallery objects.

After having all these impressive thoughts in my head, I am starting to look now for our key-messages in these reconstructed building within our galleries. I am sharing these experiences with my colleagues, asking them to think with me during the session about the main purpose of the galleries and the questions to consider: Is it to explain the funerary rituals for the visitors; or the nature of the Egyptian temple; or the daily care of god; festivals and belief etc.?

Now the members of the museum Exhibition department bring up all these ideas in our meetings and aim to fill the missing aspects from our galleries. We are working now to enhance our vision of how to set a dialogue through these reconstructed builds to help the visitors to understand their functions.

Session 2

The role of the Interpretation team in UK museums. Everyone attending my session was unaware completely about this team and its function. I explain its role in the museum and how this team helps the visitors understand the meaning of the objects on display; how the interpretation team helps the designer to interpret what curators want to tell to the public and how they help in explain the exhibition narrative.

After this session we had an interesting discussion about the functions of this team, and it turns out that part of our work is as interpreters. This is good in a way, but in another way, all the members of the team agree that it is necessary to have a separate team working on interpretation at this point of project.

Public programmes

The ITP gave me a broader view of using learning programmes more widely in the museum, and how this is very effective in creating a deeper engagement with school children, adults, and families. The ITP showed me to think about '*how will the museum appeal to different audiences from all ages and different social classes*'. Since GEM is currently one of the largest museum development projects in the world it has a future plan to have different activities and learning programmes in order to achieve broader goals.

Although this is not my specialist area, I am not a learning officer, the ITP made me understand ***the importance of not making a museum visit in isolation***. I have seen many programmes on learning and a range of activities for audiences from the different museums I visited and I brought up all these ideas together to create an assessment document looking at the following:

- Produce supporting material to help the teachers do workshops for children and run a museum visit.
- Set workshops, not only for school children, but for children with special needs.

- Create boxes containing real objects or replicas to be handled as it is a unique experience that can empower and inspire all ages.
- Get some objects out to be accessible for children, or other audiences, and use it in learning to convey a meaning and create a new narrative.
- How to bring history to life by using DVD's of different topics in history which will encourage the children's curiosity and desire to explore and find out more.

All these interesting points, I will apply to my museum in arranging with the learning team.

The Partnership Museum; TWAM

The 10 days I spent at the partnership museum - TWAM – gave me access to a broader range of skills that had an impressive impact upon me and my work as well as it offered me an insight into 12 site museums all with different experiences.

This experience help me develop a complete understanding of how museums could create a dialogue for the cultural wealth of the country displaying the high points of the local history and to tell the broad story of the North East of UK.

I had seen many small museums with different types of displays, different galleries, different themes, and many interactive media to attract the visitors; the **Discovery Museum** is one of the largest and most popular visitor attractions in the North East, where a lot of activities for families and children are running.

The Great North Museum where you move with the aid of modern technologies to create a comprehensive virtual museum experience. The tour of the Egyptian gallery, "Life and Death in ancient Egypt" has a lot of explanatory materials in terms of images, sound, maps, illustration panels etc. to show the process of agriculture in ancient Egypt, models like a Shadouf to show the irrigation system, they even made a tunnel or a bridge that the visitor has to cross over to reach to the other gallery on death where they can explore the theme of afterlife in ancient Egypt. All this supporting materials are used to explain how the ancient Egyptians lived, and how they prepared for the hereafter, and help the visitor to increase his understanding with the displayed objects.

Sunderland Museum and its magnificent winter garden, makes me realize the necessity of thinking of the visitor experience and the important of having different facilities attached to the museum.

All these display ideas, methods of making the visitors more engaged with the displays, using interactive technologies to appeal to different audiences, are very useful and valuable to be introduced into the exhibition program of Grand Egyptian Museum.

In the addition to the above, I had a very interesting day of sessions on **preventive care, collections management and conservation of the museum collections** at the BM. During these workshops I learnt many techniques that have increased my knowledge as a curator and will be very beneficial for the Grand Egyptian Museum, such as:

- Collection management procedures, documentation, how to complete a museum object form and cataloguing procedures.
- Techniques of handling & moving objects, treating all objects with respect and handled with care, gloves should be always worn when handling object, etc.

- Guidelines for cleaning museum objects. Where object cleaning should be carried out? How often? The frequency of cleaning will depend on display conditions and material type. Types of cleaning, procedures of cleaning.
- Object Movement, general rules for moving all objects. Planning and considering all aspects of the move in advance, as the risk of something going wrong can be significantly reduced by preliminary planning. Transportation and when moving an object any distance it is desirable to use a trolley as this greatly reduces the possibilities for accidental damage and also ensure the minimum of handling.



(Me training on labeling and marking an object, Discovery Museum, Newcastle)

- Labelling & Marking: Handling for labeling, methods and techniques. Identify where to mark an object, choosing appropriate methods of marking preparing an area to be marked, how to write letters and numbers using a standard style.

All these techniques are very useful to my museum, especially at the point where we will start moving the selected artifacts from the different sites and museums around Egypt in to the new GEM building. Therefore I have prepared a document covering this area to deliver to the team who in charge of this mission.

These 40 days were a unique experience for me, it was like a great adventure to have such valuable information together with magnificent daytrips in London and Newcastle. I had a great deal of fun at Newcastle, I enjoyed the daytrips with Jackie; at Alnwick Castle, the Angel of the North, even the shopping trips, I'll never forget the smell of fresh air and woodland where I spent a fantastic weekend visit to Hadrian's Wall with Bill and Jackie, I feel like It was a dream.

When I moved to London I was overwhelmed with many wonderful daytrips: the London Eye, Hampstead Heath, Stonehenge, Salisbury... and many other fabulous places with Claire and Shezza.

ITP was a chance to meet new people from different cultures. I gained a lot of friends from all over the world, and I now have contacts with fellow museum professionals. In addition ITP provided me with much more confidence to present myself as a capable well-rounded curator and to improve my English language as well.