

Cultural Skills Research

Preliminary research for the museum sector in Greece



Foreword



Greece offers the perfect setting to undertake this research given its rich and diverse cultural heritage.

This piece of sector-specific research will complement our existing skills agenda in Greece and also serve as new intelligence to further direct and drive the focus of our work.

Our aim through our cultural skills programmes is to provide a platform for skills exchange between the UK and Greece and build a vibrant, robust and sustainable cultural sector for the future. This report will act as a springboard from which we will initiate new opportunities to benefit generations of museum and cultural heritage practitioners across Greece and beyond.

The British Council's unique global position can offer the cultural sector access to UK sector-specific expertise, while simultaneously facilitating the promotion of multilateral cultural skills exchange via its extensive overseas network and audiences reach. To ensure longevity and the endurance of its programmes, the British Council cannot conduct activity alone; working in tandem with UK and

regional partners adds value to the British Council's ability to succeed in its mission to build trust and understanding between peoples of the world, and strengthen international cultural relations by engendering mutuality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon T Dancey'.

Simon T Dancey
Global Director,
Cultural Skills

Foreword



Research is about sharing and it is about seeing where there are more opportunities for greater innovation and learning. I believe that this preliminary analysis of the needs of the museum sector in Greece achieves just that. It identifies some of the ways that a focus on creative enterprise and skills development can lead to more sustainability. It also shows that such an important part of the process is joining together to exchange knowledge, share best practice and learn from others.

In periods of change and uncertainty it is surely the case that arts and cultural heritage have an even more important role to play in building connections and encouraging openness and an outward looking approach. In the museums sector that will be helped by giving professionals working in institutions and organisations the opportunities to increase their practical knowledge, obtain new skills and develop tools to build links which are more international and are more focused on positive change. That in turn will contribute to growth, economic success and greater awareness

of the huge value of such a very important sector in Greece.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Buckby', enclosed in a thin black rectangular box.

Tony Buckby
Director, British
Council Greece

Background And Research Aims

Following research by the British Council's Cultural Skills Unit into the cultural sector in Greece in 2014 which highlighted a gap in a variety of skills across the creative sectors including the museums sector, the British Council, with the support of Stavros Niarchos Foundation, will be launching the 'Transform Future Museums' - a two year programme aiming to radically transform the museum sector in Greece. Skills training for museum professionals through the model of the International Museums Academy is a key strand of this programme. Having run successfully in other countries previously, the vision of the International Museum Academy model is to provide emerging museum and gallery leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to increase the growth and sustainability of galleries and museums and equip museum professionals with the right skills and knowledge so as to become competitive in an international environment and to transform the sector overall in Greece.

The ambitious Transforming Future Museums - International Museum Academy Programme has the following objectives:

- Develop the capacities of museum and cultural heritage professionals and equip them with the relevant, up-to-date and fresh skills to respond to the needs, opportunities and challenges of tomorrow
- Foster working cultures which encourage openness, collaboration, innovation and allow for risk and failure
- Create an empowered national network of museum and heritage professionals which will share knowledge, exchange good practices and work as champions and advocates for the sector
- Give them access to a growing global network of museum professionals and connect them with other institutions and individual professionals in an international forum
- Broaden vision and strengthen professional confidence of the museum workforce to empower them to become agents of change within their organisations and shape the future
- Articulate clear arguments, and raise awareness of the value of heritage and museums in cultural, social, economic and environmental development and provide advocacy for the sector to influence national, regional and local policies.

To respond to the ambitious aims and targets of the programme, it is of key importance that we have a clear understanding of the specific requirements of the sector to ensure that the programme can assist in growing and nourishing the sector in every way possible. With this in mind, it was decided to conduct further research, exploring the museum sector in more depth, to ensure that the programme is shaped to respond to the sector's needs. The aim of this research is to identify and prioritise learning needs and skills gaps in the museum sector across Greece. This will in turn form the outline of the topics covered at the International Museum Academy (IMA) in Greece from summer 2016 and will help to inform who is our target audience to participate in the Academy. This summary paper provides an overview of the key findings relating to the skills gaps and shortages within the sector.

The Research Methodology

The research includes three main strands; desk research, face to face interviews, and an online survey. Each strand of the research is detailed below.

Desk research

The first stage of the research included the gathering of contextual information to understand more about the museum sector in Greece. The previous CS research on EU Europe¹ and the initial needs analysis document for the project were used as a basis, and other relevant previous research were also explored.

Face-to-face interviews

Following the desk research, we undertook a series of interviews in Athens and Thessaloniki. In total, we spoke with 32 individuals representing 26 organisations. Interview participants were chosen to represent a range of different individuals working across a variety of roles; from curators to directors. A list of organisations who took part in the research can be found in appendix 1.

Online survey

In order to ensure that the research covers a wide geographic area, we sent out an online survey to a range of cultural practitioners from across Greece. The survey sought to put some of the findings from the interviews to the test. In total, 120 individuals took part in the online survey.

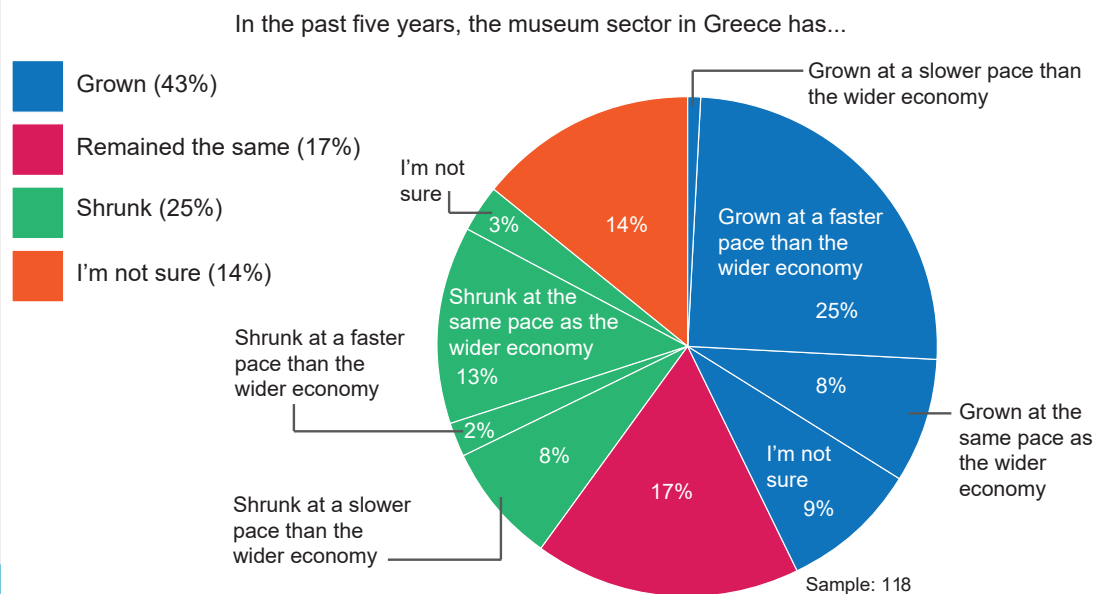
The Museum Sector In Greece

The museum sector within the wider economy

The economic crisis in Greece has changed everything, both in the museum sector and in other sectors. Funding to many cultural organisations, both public and private, has been cut, and few people are entering into employment in the museum sector.

Despite the economic condition and job cuts and restrictions associated with the economic sanctions, when asked about changes in the size of the museum sector over the past five years, more than four in ten (43%) felt that the sector had actually grown, and 25% of the total survey sample felt that it had grown at a faster rate than the wider economy. The fact that response to this question is not resoundingly negative shows the sector in a positive light, given hardships in other sectors.

Figure 1 – Perceptions of the museum sector in Greece over the past five years



While the economic sanctions have resulted in a recruitment freeze across public sector organisations, there has not yet been evidence of museums having to shut down or merge due to lack of funding² despite these staff and operational cuts; instead people are looking for alternative ways to save money.

One observation has been the decrease of large scale temporary exhibitions, production costs of which can be costly. Rather than disregarding exhibition schedules in their entirety, many have kept them in place but are working to develop exhibitions at a much smaller scale so as to save on costs. It has also been highlighted that there has been an increase in collaborative working across a number of museums within one geographical area since working together often has financial benefits³.

What does the museum sector look like?*

There are around 300 public museums in Greece and likely a similar number of privately owned and managed venues⁴. The most usual focus of these museums is Greece's cultural heritage and antiquities, with art galleries and contemporary culture playing a much smaller role in Greece's museum make up.

As the two largest cities in Greece, it is unsurprising that many museums are clustered within Athens and Thessaloniki. While there are a number of museums outside of these two cities, many are based in smaller towns and villages and may be little more than excavation sites, making them difficult to compare with larger scale city museums. That said, the largest museum in Greece by visitor numbers, the new Acropolis Museum, is also not necessarily comparable with other museums given that it attracts almost three times the number of visits compared to the next largest venue. Between January and November 2015, the New Acropolis Museum reported 1.4 million visits⁵. The second most popular museum according to visit figures is the National Archaeological museum, which recorded 459,000 visits for the same period⁶, thus demonstrating the significant difference between the top two venues.

While historically museums have been the responsibility of the Greek state, in recent years funding has dried up as a result of the financial crisis, and organisations have been forced to explore alternative funding sources such as the Desde Foundation, Bodassakis Foundation and Theotharakis Foundation. Among others, two organisations that are key to the realisation of programmes and initiatives are the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Alexandros Onassis Foundation. Both grant-giving organisations support projects that have wide public benefit and have a focus on arts, culture, education, health and social welfare. Both organisations have contributed significantly to the cultural landscape in Greece; the Onassis Cultural Centre opened in Athens in 2010 and includes a theatre, cinema and exhibition space, while construction of the Niarchos Cultural Centre is set to finish this year, and once completed will provide a permanent space for the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera. There are also a range of smaller organisations or initiatives working to support or enhance the cultural sector, including Athens Biennale and the NEON Foundation.

*When we talk about the museum sector, unless otherwise stated, we include art galleries and sites of archaeological interest as part of this.

The role of Greece's vast cultural heritage

Greece has a rich cultural heritage and prides itself on being the birthplace of Western civilisation⁷. With its history steeping back as early as 7000 BC⁸, it is unsurprising that Greece has an abundance of archaeological sites of interest, not to mention the incredible wealth of preserved objects and antiquities. In order to maintain these objects, buildings and excavation sites, the country not only needs the manpower to excavate, study and maintain these objects and places of historical significance, but also requires venues to house it. As such, of the c.300 public museums in Greece, over 200 of them are archaeological museums⁹.

This cultural heritage is obviously of great national and international significance, and deserves its place within the museum sector. However, the research highlighted the feeling that perhaps the time has come for the focus to shift away from this, and perhaps start to look towards the future rather than back into the past. The interview participants highlighted two clear points in relation to this issue; the first being about focus within the museum sector, compared to other countries, and the second in relation to staff employed within these institutions. Both points have a clear link to comparison with how things are developing in museum sectors outside of Greece. In relation to the first issue, interview participants felt that other areas, such as contemporary art, or science, were often overlooked and perhaps not given an equal status, compared to cultural heritage. They felt that this not only had implications in terms of the museum offer available in Greece, which, while rich, may be relatively limited to cultural heritage, but also to how this offer is relevant and interesting to a modern society. The second point relates to the staff working within the museum sector in Greece, a large proportion of whom hold academic qualifications in areas such as archaeology and art history. As other countries have seen the museum sector workforce diversify away from academic, subject-focussed staff, to include a wider variety of skill sets including business support, education and interpretation of objects and artefacts, interview participants highlighted that this is also important in Greece, although it is not universally recognised.

The sector's relationship with the state

While alternative funding streams are increasingly being used, the majority of museums still heavily rely on the state to cover core costs. Given the proportion of archaeological museums, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sport's 'Archaeological Receipts Fund' takes responsibility for all public museums which have an archaeological focus. This Directorate is responsible for collecting income from across all publicly funded archaeological museums in Greece, and re-distributing funds within this set. The only exception to this is the New Acropolis Museum, which manages its own budget, under the authorisation of the Archaeological Receipts Fund. While this approach helps to

maintain and support smaller regional venues which might struggle to meet their running costs, it has far reaching implications for the many venues that do not have control of their budgets, as there is little incentive to generate disposable income.

It has been identified that state museums endure high levels of bureaucracy, making it very difficult to make significant changes without passing plans by the Ministry for Culture first.

The funding gap

While the financial crisis has been mentioned above, it would be remiss not to detail the specific impact of the crisis on the museum sector. The challenges faced by museums in light of the financial crisis and subsequent budget and staff cuts was the most commonly mentioned issue throughout the research, and one that respondents felt should be addressed as a priority as part of the IMA programme. Subsequent problems associated with these cuts include staff having to perform multiple roles and limited or non-existent programme budgets as a result of cuts to state-managed venues. Several respondents saw this as an opportunity as well as a challenge, with the chance to move away from the control of the state and become more independent, but they recognised that they had little experience of how to achieve this.

‘The crisis has given us an opportunity to start from scratch and also to make our institutions more clear financially and more independent also because we have to try to find money, not only from the government. We have to find new ways to raise money which, until now, we haven’t thought about.’

Research participant

Increasingly, museum professionals are being forced to identify alternative methods of income generation and are keen to learn more about things like how to establish relationships with potential sponsors, where to look for grants, and how to generate more income from commercial activities such as venue hire or the shop or café. These areas will be explored further in the next chapter.

Skills Providers

Museum education courses

Despite a significant rise in museum-related educational training courses over the past 20-30 years in the UK, this has been less prevalent in Greece. While there now exists a number of museum studies courses across several universities in Greece, it remains more common for employees working in the museum sector to hold qualifications more closely related to the collections, such as archaeology or art history, rather than the museum itself. A strong knowledge of the collections across the whole museum staff is invaluable to the organisation, but several research participants highlighted their concern that the lack of individuals working in the sector with relevant museology qualifications could be putting Greece at a disadvantage compared to museums in other countries in terms of up to date knowledge and practice relating to non-collection based elements of the organisation, such as visitor services, learning, management etc.

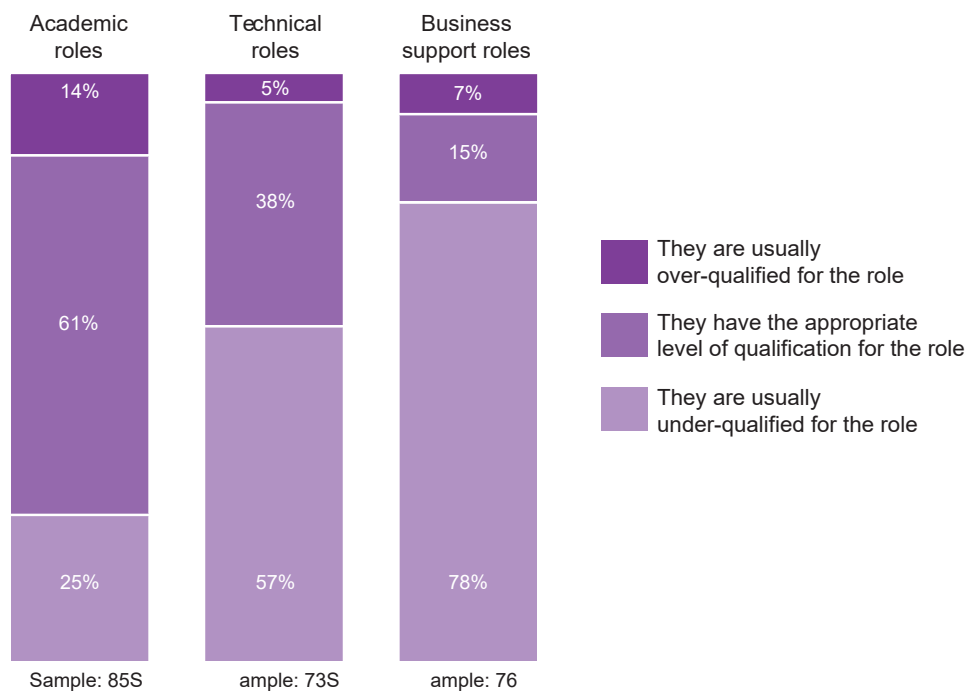
Despite an increase in academic qualifications in museum studies in Greece, 59% of respondents to the online survey felt that the museum sector suffers from a shortage of skills providers for certain skills.

It is not uncommon for individuals working in the museum sector in Greece who have gained a qualification in museum studies to have studied in the UK or USA, as several interview participants highlighted that courses in this discipline are often considered superior compared to their Greek equivalent. Despite this, people are increasingly taking up museum studies courses in Greece as more high level courses are offered, but there is a disconnect once individuals complete their course due to the vacuum of entry level positions, as a result of the financial crisis. This raises an increasingly plausible concern that Greeks are learning in Greece but taking their expertise elsewhere where the job market is more active.

Preparedness for work

The model below illustrates the imbalance, as detailed previously, in the proportion of individuals equipped with relevant non-academic, or non-collection focussed skills; respondents were three times as likely to think that school and university leavers were under-qualified for business support roles compared to more academic roles, such as curatorial or archive related roles.

Figure 2 - How well qualified are school and university leavers for roles in different areas of museum work?



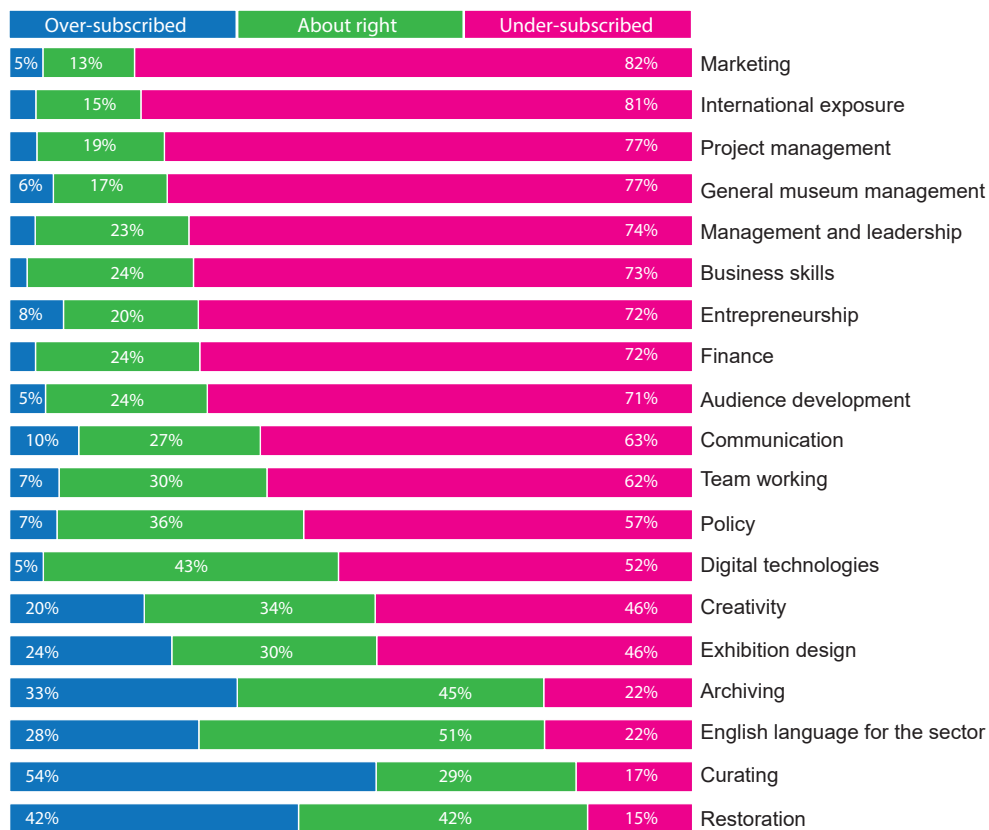
Supporting recent graduates

Given the state of the employment market, many museum studies graduates find themselves looking for voluntary positions in museums so as to gain experience and make themselves more employable as and when the opportunities present themselves. Research participants, however, indicated that many museums struggle to use volunteers and non-paid interns effectively. In addition to much debate as to the ethics of recruiting volunteers for what should be paid positions, respondents mentioned their confusion about the legalities of employing volunteers which meant, for many, that they simply didn't take on any volunteers for fear of legal or tax related repercussions. There are, however, examples globally, of effective volunteer and internship programmes which provide excellent opportunities not only for organisations to benefit from the unpaid workforce, but also for the volunteers themselves to take part in a rewarding programme that benefits them in terms of the experience they gain.

Skills Gaps And Shortages

The research sought to understand exactly where the gaps lay with regards to skills in the museum sector. The graph below illustrates that, of the 19 areas tested as part of an online survey, 13 were considered to be under-subscribed by at least half of respondents. The skills that were generally considered to be over-subscribed are the skills associated with the collections; archiving, curating and restoration. These skills require extensive subject knowledge of the objects and collections, in line with the high proportion of subject specialists working in the museum sector in Greece. English language for the sector was the only skill considered to be 'about right' by at least half of respondents.

Figure 3 – Which skills are over and under subscribed within the museum sector, and which are about right?



Sample: 71-83

The most undersubscribed areas include marketing, project management, general museum management, business and management skills, as well as associated skills such as entrepreneurship and finance, and audience development. While not a skill specifically, exposure to international best practice was highlighted as an area where supply does not meet demand. Several interview respondents also highlighted this point, indicating that the sector in Greece was cut off from the international community.

Interview participants gave broadly similar responses as the online survey, mentioning key areas like business related skills including income generation, management and leadership, entrepreneurship and basic project management, digital skills, museum management, and audience development as key priorities that would be useful for up-skilling professionals and enhancing the sector overall. These skills are explored in more detail below.

Business related skills

While few respondents used the word 'business' almost all mentioned skills related to operating in a more business-like way. It was identified that the museum sector in Greece tends not to think of itself as business-like' and discussion of this kind of thing can be quite difficult; people don't like to talk of things like making money, as it feels exploitative in some way and at odds with the aims of a museum generally. Respondents did, however, speak of the need to become more professionally minded, in order to work towards enhanced income generation and to operate in a more similar way to organisations elsewhere in the world.

Mentioned universally throughout the interviews, income generation is imperative to the survival of many museums. Respondents recognised successful sponsorship relationships in other museums internationally, but weren't sure how to replicate this within their own organisations. Participants want to learn how to establish such relationships, who to approach and how to broach the subject of sponsorship. They also mentioned an inexperience in maintaining relationships of this nature, and ensuring that sponsorship doesn't result in the work of the museum being compromised in any way in favour of the sponsor's interests.

Further to this, respondents discussed the availability of funding and grants, both within Greece and internationally. Several individuals interviewed felt that there was lots of funding available, but they weren't sure how to access it. Even if they did find a fund to apply to, they mentioned that it could be troublesome to complete lengthy and arduous forms when they had no experience of what makes a good application; this was particularly true for smaller organisations.

Some respondents said that they would value information about alternative, more commercial fundraising options such as shops and cafes, or venue hire, but these respondents were in the minority, and it is likely that this would not be appropriate to all organisations. Membership, a successful income generation scheme for many UK organisations was not mentioned, but this may be due to the financial climate in Greece currently, meaning that a membership scheme would not be successful because it may be considered too much of a luxury for those with less disposable income than they were used to.

A couple of interview respondents made the point that fundraising is not successful if there is only one person within the whole organisation who is responsible for it; it must be an organisational attitude in order for it to be successful.

Some respondents indicated that they would like to learn more about leadership. This was not mentioned in all interviews but those who did raise it said that it was becoming increasingly important within the sector. They suggested that it would be useful to learn more about what it means to be a good leader, and mentioned that this kind of training might encourage people to think that leadership is not just important for the top job, but throughout a variety of roles.

Respondents consistently mentioned the importance of communication skills, in a variety of different contexts. Some respondents felt that it would be important to learn about basic communications, such as the basic principles of writing an email, through to getting the correct tone when communicating with different audiences, both written and verbally. Respondents stressed the importance of effective internal communications, in order to express one's duties to colleagues working in different roles so as to ensure that all staff value one another's roles and responsibilities, as well as external communications such as writing newsletters and addressing followers on social media. Several respondents were aware that the key to effective communication lay in the ability to be clear and concise, but felt that it may be useful to have access to examples of best practice in communication styles.

Numerous respondents were keen to learn more about basic project management, and felt it would really enhance the sector. These kinds of skills are invaluable in helping to professionalise the sector, but also a necessity for organisations in receipt of funding, where it is often necessary to provide a detailed breakdown of the project being funded, how long it will last, the aims of the project, and how funds will be spent. Respondents were keen to mention that many people knew how to talk about these basic measures in theory, but in practice it might seem daunting to have to do things like write a business plan.

Museum management

Several respondents suggested that, as roles within a museum become increasingly diverse, it would be useful for all staff to have a basic understanding of museology, so as to better understand what happens across the organisation overall. Those who mentioned this felt that if all staff had a basic knowledge of the work of the whole organisation, it would help to facilitate more effective working across different teams and roles.

Digital skills

A large proportion of respondents were keen to learn more about how museums can use things like social media platforms more effectively. Many respondents mentioned that they are unable to employ someone to work on this full time; in fact many rely on volunteers to undertake their social media activity. While there are many people in Greece with the necessary digital skills, museums are often unable to take these people on due to lack of funds.

Volunteer management

As mentioned previously, there are large proportions of individuals eager to volunteer in museums but for many organisations, volunteers can be more hassle than they're worth since many are not sure how to manage them or what tasks they could or should be involved in. Several respondents indicated that, while they rely heavily on volunteers, it can be difficult since the volunteers may not be around for long if they are looking for fulltime employment, meaning that training them up could be costly and result in little reward. This challenge of establishing a programme that is of real value to both the organisation and the individual volunteer is not unique to Greece, and sharing of case studies regarding effective programme development could be useful in helping programme participants to understand what else is being done in this area.

Collection and exhibition management

A number of interview respondents mentioned skills related to management of collections and exhibitions that would be useful to learn about. Specifically, individuals talked about the need for more effective documentation of collections, which would not only improve collection management practices but also assist in any future digitisation projects. International best practice in relation to donations, storage, lending and borrowing of objects would also help Greek organisations to engage more with the international community.

Further to learning about collection management techniques, several respondents were keen to learn more about touring exhibitions; something that isn't especially common within Greece. Respondents also highlighted the importance of learning more about copyright information and related legal issues. Learning more about the legalities and practicalities of developing an exhibition that could tour both within Greece and internationally could help in the long term to establish a strong museum network.

Evaluation

Formal evaluation is not a common practice within the museum sector in Greece, but a number of respondents think there would be a value in changing the culture so as to help people see the value of evaluation, and subsequent improvement of programmes and initiatives. A number of people discussed the need for evaluation when in receipt of grant funding, as it is necessary to report back to funding bodies on the outcomes of a programme.

Audience development and engagement

Respondents highlighted a number of areas where they felt it would be beneficial to learn more about audience engagement and development, from engaging with the local community, to doing more to showcase their collections online.

Several respondents discussed the need to make their collections more relevant and useful to today's society. Effective interpretation of collections to make them relevant to today could increase visitor numbers and create a more dynamic space for visitors to use. It could also work to address issues of social inclusion and cohesion.

One respondent indicated that they would like to work towards market testing of exhibitions of gallery spaces, to understand what kind of things visitors and potential visitors want from a venue. This respondent felt that this would help the organisation to develop a closer relationship with their audience, but they lacked the relevant skills or tools to know how to undertake this kind of market testing.

Several respondents mentioned the lack of marketers in the cultural sector as a whole, despite effective marketers working in other sectors. As such, the marketing undertaken in museums in Greece tends to be done by trial and error, where it is done at all. Many respondents felt that this was more of a role that was missing from the sector, rather than a skill that someone could pick up in addition to their existing duties.

A handful of respondents noted that several museums outside of Greece have developed effective audience development strategies that involve digitising their collections and encouraging 'virtual visitors' to engage online as well as working to engage people within the physical venue. Respondents were concerned that this is not something that is happening across Greece, but it is important to start thinking about audience engagement through digital mediums in order to open up to a potentially global audience.

Education

Several respondents highlighted that there was a need to overhaul education programmes within museums in Greece. Many saw school trips to museums as a day out of the classroom, which was not being taken as seriously as it should be. A number of individuals suggested that there should be a greater focus on outreach; engaging with local schools to bring objects into the classroom, perhaps as a follow up to a visit to the museum, so that there is an opportunity for a trip to the museum to have greater impact on students.

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About The British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide. Our 7,000 staff in more than 100 countries work with thousands of professionals and policy makers and millions of young people every year through English, arts, education and society programmes. We are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter. All our work is in pursuit of our charitable purpose and creates prosperity and security for the UK and the countries we work in all around the world.

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About Cultural Skills

From museums to music, fashion to film, the skills that support the artistic process are vital to the development of a thriving cultural sector around the globe. Skills range from technical specialism, to leadership and management; policy and qualification development, to youth engagement and English language.

Cultural Skills strengthen cultural relations between the UK and the rest of the world through sharing knowledge and developing mutual benefit. With UK and international partners, we work to build sustainable cultural skills programmes that develop the skills of practitioners and institutions across the whole of the UK and internationally, supporting the artistic, social and economic benefits of a thriving and dynamic cultural sector.

The research was conducted by Erica Roscoe, Research Manager, Cultural Skills, British Council.

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