

Committee:	Community; Operations	Agenda Item
Date:	24 January 2008; 31st January 2008	6
Title:	Special Arrangements for Retirement and Recruitment of Museum Education Officer	
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Summary

The planned retirement of the Museum Education Officer in May 2008 requires an uninterrupted transition to her successor if services to schools, and therefore visitor numbers and income, are to be maintained. Permission is requested to begin the recruitment process in February 2008 so that a successor can start in May, with a two-week overlap. The overlap is needed so that the new Education Officer can be inducted by the outgoing post holder and have time to prepare sufficient teaching sessions to maintain a basic service in the second half of term.

Recommendations

Recruitment for a new Education Officer is permitted to commence in February with the aim of appointing a new post holder to start on 19 May 2008 and ensure uninterrupted provision of service.

Background Papers

None

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Schools booking enquiries for after April 2008 are currently being taken on a provisional basis, but need confirmation
Community Safety	None
Equalities	
Finance	Small additional salary cost of £860 approximately (including on-costs)
Human Rights	
Legal implications	

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Sustainability	Necessary to sustain high-profile service to schools and maintain customer base in long-term
Ward-specific impacts	Potentially all wards
Workforce/Workplace	Minimal impact if new Education Officer is recruited in May

Situation

- 1 The Museum Education Office will be retiring after April 2008 and an immediate replacement is needed to ensure continuity of services to schools and of the holiday activity programme and hence continuity of visitor figures and income. The Museum's education services require a dedicated specialist and a typical pre-booked school session, including preparation and clearing up, take up most of the working day, with additional time needed to administer school bookings and plan with teachers for future visits, as each session is tailored to the school's and pupils' particular requirements. The Education Officer is also chiefly responsible for the Museum's holiday family activity programme, in collaboration with other staff depending on the subject matter. It would not be possible for other staff to take over delivery of school sessions, as all have their own specialist roles of equal importance to the operation of the service. The absence of an Education Officer would also reduce capacity for providing a varied holiday activity programme to current levels.
- 2 At least 5,000 school pupils per year benefit from taught sessions with handling collections of objects and specimens in the Museum. The breadth of collections in the Museum allows a wide range of subjects to be offered in support of the National Curriculum, such as 'Ancient Egypt' or 'Signs of Spring', and 'bespoke' sessions are sometimes devised to meet special requests from schools, for example 'Mazes and Problem-solving'. It has taken the present Education Officer some years and much research to build up the range of topics currently on offer, and use of Bridge End Garden has been built into appropriate topics whenever opportunity permits. School visits are a major contributor to visitor / user figures for the Museum Service and a major contributor to income, from fees raised (currently £2 per child) and sale of souvenirs, for which school parties are the largest customers; it is estimated that schools are responsible for at least 60% of sales (= approximately £6,000 in 2006-07 due to schools). Audience research has also shown that a number of family visits are generated by children bringing their parents or grandparents to the Museum because they enjoyed their school visit so much.
- 3 Normal recruitment procedures would entail a gap of some months between the retirement of the Education Officer at the end of May and the earliest likely date for a successor to be in post (November 2008). Without the benefit of an overlap between post-holders and rapid induction, it would take the new

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Education Officer longer to become sufficiently familiar with collections and the most popular subjects requested to deliver at least a basic range of school sessions and activities. In practice this would mean suspending taught sessions for schools for the second half of the summer term and all of the autumn term 2008. It would still be possible to take 'independent' school visits (gallery visits from schools who do not want a taught session) but these account for only a small fraction of total school visits and do not generate income from fees.

- 4 Schools book increasingly far in advance – even now, a few requests for bookings in April/May 2008 have already been received before Christmas 2007 and can only be taken provisionally at present. An early decision on recruitment of the next Education Officer is needed so that schools can be advised as soon as possible. A suspension in services would risk losing some schools as long-term customers if they have to find alternative venues, especially now that some museums do not charge for taught school sessions (For example, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Chelmsford Museum, and it is understood that Audley End may be introducing free school sessions on the Victorians and other topics in 2008.)
- 5 To ensure continuity of services to schools, it is requested that recruitment of a successor is brought forward according to the following timetable (assuming committee approval in January 2008). This gives a two-week overlap between post-holders, which is the minimum amount of time necessary for induction and hand-over to ensure continuity of a basic service.

February 2008	advertise (usual professional/national and local channels)
Early April	interview and offer appointment
19 May	target date for new Education Office to start in post
19-23 May	one week 'crash course' for new Education Officer working alongside outgoing post-holder, to provide comprehensive induction into teaching facilities, handling collections and schools loans boxes, teaching potential for all Museum collections, types of sessions booked for rest of term.
26-30 May	half-term week for new post-holder to research and prepare their teaching sessions for June - July (and prepare for holiday activities beyond that).
30 May	retirement of out-going Education Officer

The Education Officer has kindly offered to continue to advise her successor after 30 May if needed. As far as possible, bookings for the latter half of term will be focussed on a limited range of popular topics so that the new Education Officer will not be completely overstretched with too many different sessions to prepare at once. It is expected to take the new post-holder over a year to build up to a similar range of subjects as developed by the current Education Officer.

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- 6 Cost of this would be two weeks' extra salary at an extra cost of around £860 (including on-costs) compared to having one post-holder continuously in post, but with continuity of service, visitor numbers and income guaranteed. Recruitment costs are additional to this but would have to be met at whatever date the post was advertised.
- 7 Income generated from schools varies according to numbers in each class or year, and the amount of pocket money children are allowed to spend on trips, but as a rough guide, based on 2006-07 figures, one typical week's school bookings generates an average of £250 in booking fees and £180 from sale of souvenirs, total £ 430. (Weeks towards the end of the summer term can be below average due to distractions such as sports days and the increasing number of other organisations offering activities at this time of year.)

8 **Comparison of options:**

(i) Recruit new Education officer as described above, with 2-week overlap between post-holders for smooth transition:

Cost approx £860 additional salary costs for two-week overlap but service and income maintained

(ii) Delay start date for new Education Officer till 1 June (no overlap between post-holders but need to allow longer for familiarisation, if dependent on other staff. Consequently taught session will not resume till July, so effectively four weeks of potential school bookings in June would be lost.

Approx. loss of income from fees and sales in June - £ 1,720

Saving on salary for two-week overlap + £ 860

Cost of (ii) is therefore approximately the same as option (i) - £ 860

Drop of up to about 720 in visitor / user numbers from schools (based on average weekly figure of 180 pupils + adults from school parties).

Temporary suspension of service, but risk of losing customers in long-term less than option (iii).

(iii) Delay recruitment of new Education Officer till after post-holder has retired in normal way. New Education Officer would not be in post and sufficiently familiar with collections to teach sessions before January 2009.

Approximate loss of schools income June – Dec (17 weeks) - £7,310

Saving on salary for two-week overlap + £ 860

Further salary saving June - Oct (22 weeks) + £9,460

Overall saving relative to option (i) in terms of schools only + £3,010

Drop of about 3,060 in visitor / user numbers from schools, and in addition holiday family activities and 'Museum Minis' (pre-school) programmes will also be affected. Therefore further loss of income and visitor numbers if other staff cannot maintain same level of holiday and half-term activities, and proportion of evening group visits take by Education Officer. The suspension of service to schools for about six months risks long-term loss of some customers, and will be bad for high reputation of Museum Service for education and learning. The risk is that immediate saving will be depleted in long-term by loss of customer base.

- 9 Back-up: if option (i) is chosen, option (ii) will be the back-up position if there are unexpected difficulties in getting a new Education Officer in post for 19 May. The Museum needs to be able to confirm and honour school bookings taken for June onwards, because schools need to timetable their trips long in advance and book transport, which can cost them as much as £1,000 in coach hire alone.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Loss of school visits, and associated income, after May 2008	High	High	Begin recruitment process ahead of Education Officer's retirement, to ensure continuity of service and enable advance bookings to be taken
Longer term loss of school customers to other providers if there is an interruption to services	High	High	Measures as above, so that customers do not find alternatives and stay away (especially in face of competition from other museums and venues)