

Museums Association Conference 2015 – James Etherington

What was the issue?

This case study highlights the MDY funding for museum professionals to attend key events and conferences.

How did Museum Development Yorkshire help?

James Etherington has been the Director of Ripon Museums Trust since September, having worked in museums and archives since 2003. He approached MDY for funding to attend the 2015 MA Conference. He found the experience incredibly valuable.

What happened?

‘The Conference is fantastic for anyone in any role within a museum organisation as I can pretty much guarantee you will find something of interest for you. There were big debates on museum ethics and workforce, smaller sessions including collections management, digital engagement, marketing, advocacy, working with universities, working with teenagers and taking inspiration from football clubs. There was a real theme this year on diversity, both within the workforce, within our audiences and within our collections.

I think the only negative from the programming front I felt was a lack of focus on front of house skills and customer interaction. I feel it is a key area and its omission was telling. I tweeted about it in the strongest possible terms! And that is another thing, the conference is very digital and tweet ups and social media conversations are very much the order of the day.

There were also headline acts from major funding bodies including the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Chair Peter Luff and a keynote from Darren Henley the Chief Executive of Arts Council England.

I came away with a lot of good ideas and insights into the new and cutting edge work happening across the sector. My old boss at the National Trust used to encourage us to 'steal with pride' when it came to good ideas, and I definitely filled my swag bag! I also came away with an overwhelming feeling of belonging. I think it can be easy, especially in smaller museums, to feel overwhelmed, to feel the mounting pressures and worries. What I got from conference was a feeling that we are not alone, that there are a lot of other people out there who are facing similar challenges and are more than happy to talk about it.

The Conference was hosted (ably I must say) by Birmingham Museums and their facilitator urged us to talk to each other. With each delegate having a massive badge proclaiming their name and museum, it was easy to identify people and start conversations and that was another valuable benefit.

There was also a really useful careers café that provided advice for people in all stages of a museum career from skills like cv writing and interviewing, change management and influencing and successful freelancing tips.

Would I go again if I had to pay for it myself? For me it is a massive yes. The opportunity to liaise with colleagues from across the sector, to feel part of something wider, to share problems and discuss solutions and to steal the best ideas from elsewhere in the sector and adapt them to suit my own organisation is well worth the time and money it requires to attend'.

Find out more

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