

Pay in museums



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Foreword

Museums can be wonderful places to work, as well as to visit. Every year, hundreds of people try to set out on a museum career. With so many people eager to work in museums, we can be lulled into thinking that salary levels are not an issue.

But concern about levels of pay in museums has been growing in recent years. It is becoming more apparent that low pay has an impact on the nature of the museum workforce, causing problems with morale, recruitment and retention, leadership and diversity.

Without reliable information about levels of pay, we cannot take steps to address the problems that low pay causes. This survey by the Museums Association provides the first authoritative analysis of pay in museums since 1988. It looks especially at junior and middle ranking jobs, in five key areas of museum work, across the whole of the UK museum sector. We are very grateful to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for its support, which has made the research possible.

Many of the survey's findings make disturbing reading. The most telling results of the survey and the most significant areas of concern are listed below, and are highlighted in the main body of this summary report. A full report, which includes more detailed breakdowns of the figures and some additional information, is available on the Museums Association website www.museumsassociation.org

The Museums Association will be acting on the results of the survey. We will work to produce a set of recommended salary levels for a range of museum jobs and will publish these. We will look at ways of providing more information to managers and employers about best practice. Low salaries are, of course, in part a consequence of underfunding. But senior managers need to take more responsibility for poor salaries in their museums and we will be working to raise their awareness of poor levels of pay and the impact this can have.

If museums are to deliver an excellent service, they have to value their staff – and this includes ensuring that salary levels reflect people's commitment and skills. This survey suggests many museums are failing in this. This has to change.

Jane Glaister
President
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Key findings

Almost everyone working in museums earns less than people working in comparable roles in other organisations in many areas of work. Museum curators earn 10 per cent less than librarians, on average. Senior conservators earn 20 per cent less than university technicians with equivalent responsibility.

The problem is much worse at more senior levels than at entry level. For example, a museum education officer with some management experience earns 42 per cent less than a teacher with equivalent responsibilities. This suggests that museums are failing to recognise the contribution made by more experienced staff and may face retention difficulties.

The typical salary for senior curators, conservators and education and outreach staff who have responsibility for a whole department is less than £25,000 a year.

In the 15 years since 1988, museum salaries have barely kept up with increases in the cost of living and have fallen considerably behind the rise in earnings in many other parts of the public sector. For example, conservators have seen their pay increase by 79 per cent on average over the 15 years, compared to a cost of living increase of 71 per cent. However, civil service scientific officers have had pay rises totalling 120 per cent over the same period.

Curators' pay has only gone up by 60 per cent in 15 years, leaving them less well off in real terms than in 1988. They were the only group in the survey to have seen a real terms decline in their salaries. This suggests that employers seriously undervalue curatorial work in particular.

Staff working in visitor services roles were the only group in the survey to have seen rises greater than those for comparable roles in other sectors. They saw an increase of 119 per cent over the 15 years from 1988 to 2003, compared to 111 per cent for library assistants.

People working in specialist roles in London museums earn little more than those working outside London, although people working in less specialist roles such as visitor services do earn considerably more in London. Since the cost of living is so much higher in London than many other parts of the UK, this means that museum specialists in London are seriously disadvantaged.

Turnover of staff in museums is relatively low; at 8 per cent a year, it is half the UK average.

A third of respondents have experienced recruitment and retention difficulties with some staff groups.

52 per cent of the workforce in the museums in the survey are women, and 3 per cent are from ethnic minorities.



The survey

The survey was carried out in autumn 2003. Independent consultants surveyed the Museums Association's institutional members to find out what these museums paid their employees

Scope and methodology

The Museums Association commissioned Incomes Data Services (IDS) to undertake the research. IDS is an independent research organisation, specialising in the employment field. The researchers were asked to find out what the average salary levels are for a number of key posts in museums; to consider how pay in museums compares with pay for comparable work and to establish whether pay for museum work has fallen behind other sectors in recent years.

The researchers sent questionnaires to all institutional members of the Museums Association. Museums were asked about salary levels for visitor services and front of house staff, education and outreach staff, conservators, curators and directors. Job descriptions were provided to help respondents classify their staff appropriately. The Museums Association decided to focus on these five key museum-specific roles for this piece of work, since different factors influence the pay of other people working in museums such as marketing and IT specialists.

Respondents were asked to group staff working in these roles into three responsibility levels – entry level, assuming no responsibility for other staff; a middle level with responsibility for some staff; and the top level of responsibility for all staff in an establishment or large department. Organisations were asked to list the salary range (minimum and maximum) and the typical salary for staff at each, or any, of these levels which applied in their museum.

The survey covers the whole sector, from large national museums to small independent museums with just one or two paid members of staff. Because it aims to look at such a wide range of organisations, some of the results are inevitably less useful than others. In particular, it is hard to draw many conclusions from the findings about the level of pay for directors, since directors' salaries are so dependent on the size of the organisation.

The most revealing information in the survey is about the salaries of junior and middle ranking staff, who make up the majority of the workforce.

The response

IDS received 212 completed survey forms covering around 327 museums or gallery sites throughout the UK. Museums from all parts of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are represented in the survey results, with respondents from all the regions of England as well as 24 completed questionnaires from Scotland, eight from Wales and three from Northern Ireland. There were replies from 26 museums in London and 151 from the English regions. These museums included national museums, local authority museums, independents and some university and armed forces organisations.

IDS processed the results independently of the Museums Association. The results were treated confidentially and no individual institutions were identified to the Museums Association.

Current salary levels

The table shows the minimum, maximum and typical salaries for five museum roles, with staff grouped into three responsibility levels. The salary figures in the shaded areas of the tables are the overall minimum, maximum and typical salaries across all the grades.

National museums emerge as the highest-paying sector. The university

and independent sectors are the lowest-paying sectors, and these sectors include the smallest museums in the sample with the fewest staff. Breakdowns of the results by sector for all roles are included in the full report; we have included the breakdown of the findings on directors' pay here, since directors' pay varies considerably according to sector.

Note: The figures in this report are the medians of those reported. The median is the middle value when all salaries in the sample are ranked in order of magnitude. It is more representative of actual salaries than taking average salaries because it removes the influence of exceptionally low or high salaries in the sample.

Note: In some cases, the 'typical' salary reported is lower than the minimum; this is because many survey respondents only gave a typical figure, not a minimum and maximum.

Summary findings on median salary levels

Job/responsibility level (number of respondents)	Median minimum £pa	Median maximum £pa	Median typical salary £pa
Visitor services/front of house/security (all)	13,335	15,000	13,713
Entry level (93)	10,956	13,337	12,000
Responsible for some staff (68)	13,581	15,372	14,090
Responsible for all staff (82)	18,168	21,107	17,000
Education/outreach staff (all)	18,265	22,000	19,400
Entry level (58)	16,375	18,582	17,442
Responsible for some staff (64)	17,720	21,000	18,096
Responsible for all staff (59)	21,282	25,000	23,358
Conservators (all)	18,437	22,444	20,088
Entry level (47)	15,336	18,582	17,500
Responsible for some staff (39)	19,000	20,500	20,469
Responsible for all staff (39)	22,866	27,015	24,726
Curators/exhibition officers (all)	19,185	22,689	20,469
Entry level (93)	15,342	18,500	16,944
Responsible for some staff (78)	19,185	22,689	20,000
Responsible for all staff (109)	22,398	25,911	24,000
Director (83)	29,000	33,642	32,000

Directors' pay by sector

As might be expected, directors earn most in national museums. Salaries are similar in local authority museums, independents and armed forces museums; and while the sample size makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions, it appears that directors in university museums are considerably better paid than other non-national directors.

Sector (number of respondents)	Median minimum £pa	Median maximum £pa	Median typical salary £pa
All museums (132)	29,000	33,642	32,000
Armed forces and other (4)	27,000	35,000	32,000
National museums (4)	—	—	85,000
Independent (47)	25,245	32,847	30,000
Local government (69)	29,035	33,642	32,000
University (8)	46,500	54,500	45,000

Comparative salary levels

The consultants looked at how pay in museums compared to other sectors. They found that museum salaries are lower than those for comparable jobs in almost all other sectors

How do museum salaries compare with those for other occupations?

The current salaries for the five museum roles were compared with those for similar occupations in both the private and public sectors. For example, the visitor services/security staff role was compared with receptionists and security staff in the private sector and to civil service support staff and university porters in the public sector. Curators were compared with university lecturers, librarians and civil engineers.

Comparisons were made of typical salary levels, using data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) for the comparator occupations. The bar charts below summarise the findings for all responsibility levels. Where possible, comparisons were also made at different levels of responsibility; full details of these more detailed comparisons are included in the full report, but some of the most significant findings are highlighted below.

Note: the full report also includes details about the exact grades or points of the salaries used for comparison.

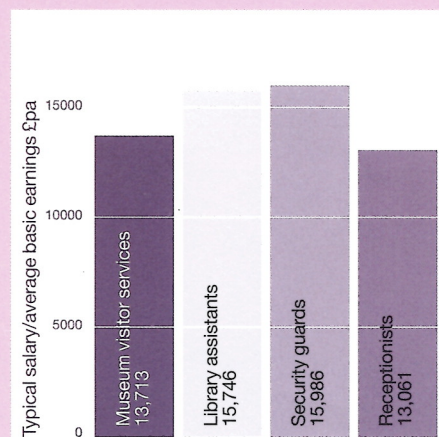
Visitor services and front of house staff

Salary levels for visitor services and front of house staff are generally below those of the comparators, although for entry-level roles museum salaries are higher than the comparators. Where museum pay is lower, the gap is larger at the maximum of salary ranges than at the minimum. These findings suggest a lack of pay progression for museum front of house staff, compared to people in similar roles in other organisations.

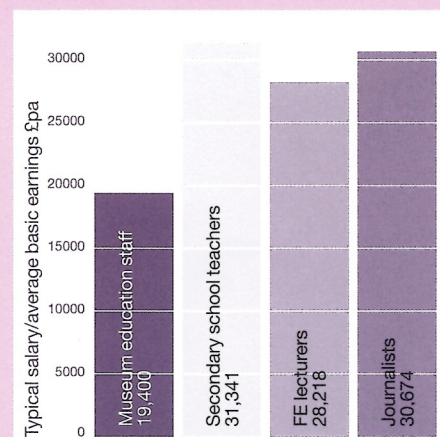
Education outreach staff

Typical salary levels for education and outreach staff in museums are substantially behind those of all the comparators; and the more senior the role, the bigger the difference. For example, an entry level museum educator earns 10 per cent less than a newly qualified teacher. But a museum education officer with some management responsibility earns 42 per cent less than a teacher with equivalent responsibility.

Comparison of current pay levels: museum visitor services/front-of-house/security staff with similar occupations



Comparison of current pay levels: museum education/outreach staff with similar occupations



Conservators

Typical salary levels for conservators are below all the comparators. Again, the gap is much narrower for entry-level minimum starting salaries, than for more senior-level roles. For example, the pay of conservators is 2 per cent below that of university technicians at entry level, but 20 per cent below at senior level.

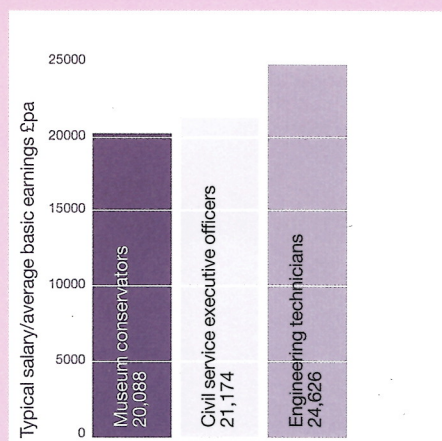
Curators

Typical salary levels for curators are below all three comparator occupations, and substantially behind two of them. Museum curators earn on average 10 per cent less than librarians, and 45 per cent less than university teaching professionals. The gap is substantial at all levels of responsibility, although it is slightly wider for the most senior-level roles.

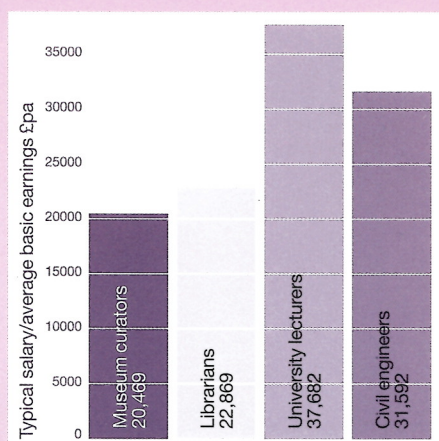
Directors

Typical salary levels for museum directors are below all three comparator occupations, and substantially behind two of them. (As noted in the introduction, the findings about directors' pay need to be treated with caution because salary levels vary so much according to the size of the organisation.)

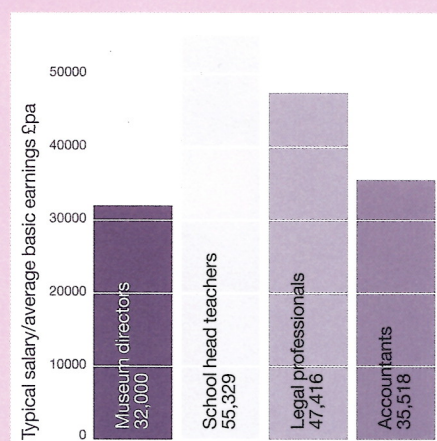
Comparison of current pay levels: museum conservators with similar occupations



Comparison of current pay levels: museum curators with similar occupations



Comparison of current pay levels: museum directors with comparable occupations



Salary growth 1988–2003

The consultants investigated how much museum salaries had increased over the past 15 years. They found that salaries in museums had not increased as much as in comparable sectors

How have museum salaries fared in the last 15 years?

The Museums Association last undertook a salary survey in 1988. IDS compared current museum salaries with salaries for the same jobs as reported in that survey. They were also compared with the salaries for other private and public sector occupations in 1988. This enabled IDS to monitor how pay for both the museum roles and the comparator occupations had changed over the past 15 years and to see whether the five benchmark museum jobs had fallen behind other occupations. The growth in median pay levels in museums was also compared with the rise in the cost of living, as measured by the all items retail prices index which, over the period April 1988 to April 2003, was 71.3 per cent.

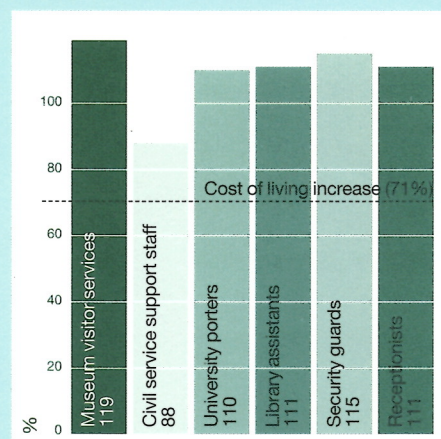
Visitor services and front of house staff

Jobs in visitor services were the only jobs we looked at which have seen their salaries grow ahead of those in comparable jobs in other sectors over the past 15 years. Pay growth for this group of staff has been moderately ahead of most comparators and substantially ahead of one comparator. The growth in museum pay has also been substantially ahead of the rise in the cost of living.

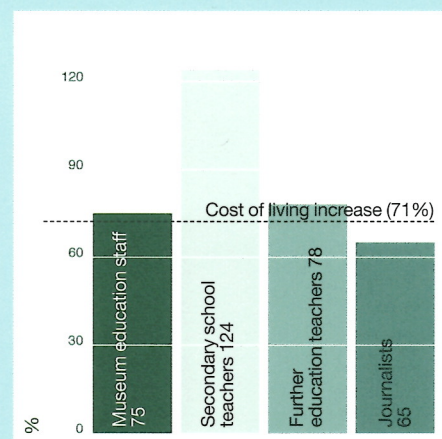
Education/outreach staff

Pay growth over the past 15 years for education and outreach staff has been only marginally ahead of the rise in the cost of living. Although education staff have fared better than journalists – the private sector comparator we chose – they have done very much less well than secondary school teachers. Since museums are in competition with schools for education staff, this clearly has the potential to impact on their ability to recruit and retain staff in this area.

Growth in pay of museum visitor services staff and comparator occupations 1988–2003



Growth in pay of museum education and outreach staff and comparator occupations 1988–2003



Conservators

Pay growth for conservators over the past 15 years has been just ahead of the cost of living. However it has been substantially behind the growth in pay of all of the comparator occupations, leaving conservators much less well-off than their peers in similar roles.

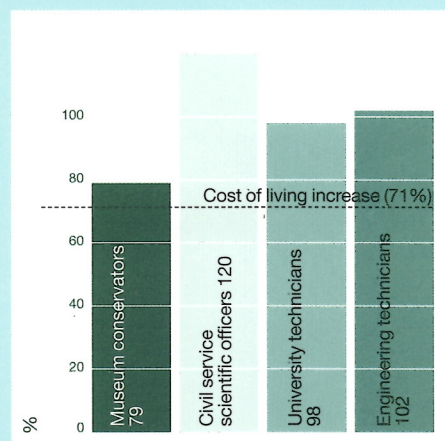
Curators

Pay growth for curators over the past 15 years has been well below the rise in the cost of living. Curatorial work was the only area covered by the survey which had seen pay growth below the cost of living, leaving curators less well off in absolute as well as relative terms than they were 15 years ago. This may reflect a decline in the status of curators, compared to other museum roles. Again, pay growth for curators has been below or substantially below the growth in pay of the comparators.

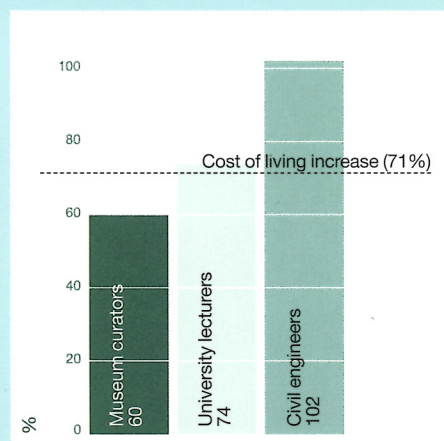
Directors

Although the survey's findings about directors' pay need to be treated with caution, there is no reason to think that the comparison with the findings from 1988 is invalid. This comparison showed that pay growth for museum directors over the past 15 years has been just ahead of the rise in the cost of living. However it has been substantially behind the growth in the pay of comparator occupations.

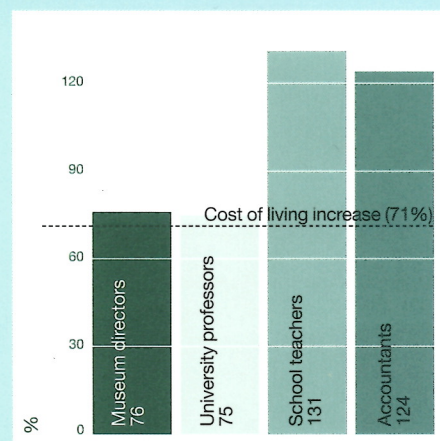
Growth in pay of conservators and comparator occupations 1988–2003



Growth in pay of curators and comparator occupations 1988–2003



Growth in pay of museum directors and comparator occupations 1988–2003



Regional variations

Pay reviews in 2003

Museum workforce

Pay in London

IDS compared salaries paid in London for some jobs with those paid outside for the same jobs. It looked at one general category of job for which there is a fairly competitive labour market and one specialist category of employment, choosing visitor services, or front-of-house, and curator grades for comparison. For both jobs the median typical salary across all grades was selected. The survey found there was a London premium of £4,419 a year for visitor services staff, but just £228 a year for curators.

Pay in London

(typical median salary)

	London £pa	National £pa
Visitor services	18,000	13,581
Curator	20,697	20,469

Pay in the regions

There is little variation in pay levels in different parts of the UK apart from in London and the South East. This mainly arises from the fact that local government and university staff are generally on national pay scales, with allowances for London and the South East.

Museums were asked about the most recent pay increases and settlement dates. The majority had agreed annual pay increases of between 3 and 4 per cent in 2003, with a median increase of 3 per cent. The majority of museums in the survey had pay reviews in April each year. These pay increases are consistent with settlement levels across the whole UK economy during 2003. The median for UK settlements in the first six months of the year was 3 per cent. This rose to 3.3 per cent in the third quarter but fell back to 3 per cent again for the last three months of 2003.

The IDS survey included questions on the make-up of the workforce – the number of full-time equivalent employees, the proportion of male to female staff and the proportion of staff from ethnic minorities, as well as whether the organisation recognised any trade unions. We found that:

- overall the museums responding to the survey employ 7,087 permanent or established staff. Of these 4,990 employees are full-time and 2,007 are part-time, with an additional 152 job sharers
- the national museums in the survey each employ an average of 500 staff. This falls to an average of 28 staff in local government museums
- the majority of the museums in the survey employ ten or fewer staff. Volunteers play a large part in the staffing of the museums, and many survey respondents mentioned how reliant they are on the services of unpaid volunteers
- some 52 per cent of the workforce are women
- some 3 per cent of the workforce are from an ethnic minority and the majority of these employees were to be found in the national and local government museums in London and the South East and the cities of the Midlands and North of England.

Staff turnover, recruitment and retention

The survey also included questions about turnover, recruitment and retention – all areas where low pay can have an impact

Turnover

Museums were asked about the estimated level of staff turnover in their organisation during the past year. The median level of reported staff turnover was 8 per cent, which is half the average rate of staff turnover among all UK organisations.

Recruitment and retention

Survey respondents were asked whether they had experienced or were experiencing difficulties with recruitment and retention, and 109 museums – six in ten of those which employed any full-time staff – said they had none. A further 60 respondents (33 per cent of museums) cited recruitment and retention problems among certain staff groups. Front of house staff and curatorial staff were the two most frequently cited groups, followed by educators.

IDS asked respondents to give the reasons for any recruitment and retention difficulties they were experiencing. The most frequent reason given was poor pay, which was mentioned by half those answering this question. Most of the other reasons were in some way linked to poor pay. The second most frequently listed reason was the lack of suitable senior or specialist applicants, and the poor pay and high housing costs in many areas were the main reasons given for difficulties in recruiting curators, education staff and archivists. Another often mentioned concern was lack of career progression.

Funding was also seen as a major reason for recruitment and retention difficulties. Tight budgets and cutbacks in local government funding and the insecure nature of funding in the independent sector have led to temporary and part-time contracts which meant a lack of security of employment.

Initiatives to address recruitment and retention problems

Over half the respondents reported that they had made improvements to pay and/or to grading structures to address the problem. Some had upgraded certain posts, and others were in the process of restructuring the whole grading system. Other initiatives included introducing clear career progression opportunities and providing training, as well as nurturing staff through team building and internal development.

Flexible working and offering seasonal staff permanent contracts were other steps taken to help attract and retain staff, and a large proportion of museums said they were advertising to a wider audience in attempts to gain more applications for vacant posts.

Other terms and conditions of employment

Museums were asked for details of other terms and conditions of employment, including hours and holidays, and overtime. The survey found:

- the basic working week for full-time museum employees was most commonly 37 to 37½ hours
- typical holiday entitlement was 20 days, rising to 30 days or more at only 7 per cent of museums
- just 15 per cent of museums in the survey offered regular paid overtime and of those that did it was only front of house and security staff who could boost their earnings by 10 per cent or more through overtime.

Pensions

Just over 64 per cent of the museums in our survey offered their full-time staff a final salary pension scheme. These were generally the central government, local government, university and armed forces museums, but included some of the larger independent organisations.

Group money purchase schemes with an employer contribution were offered by 7.5 per cent of the organisations surveyed, and a further 11.5 per cent offered other employer contribution schemes, including stakeholder pensions.

Some 17 per cent of respondents either did not offer any form of pension or did not complete this section of the questionnaire. Among these were all the small independent museums employing few or no full time staff.

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