



# Salary Research and Recommendations: 2025-26 Update

March 2026

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- 01** Purpose of the report

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  - 02** Our recommendations

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  - 03** 2025-26 update to the recommendations

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  - 04** 2025-26 salary benchmarks

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# Purpose of the report

We campaign for inclusive and diverse museums that prioritise fair working conditions and workforce wellbeing.

In November 2022 we published our detailed [Salary Research and Recommendations](#) and have encouraged employers, staff and funders to use the findings in this report as an advocacy tool to highlight the serious issues around low pay in the museum sector, negotiate better salaries and demonstrate the urgent case for reform.

Our commitment to fair pay continued with an updated [report with recommendations](#) in 2024, and we are delighted to now share with the sector a refreshed report. This inflationary review will enable museums, managers, and individuals to have the most up to date information to support advocacy and change in the sector.

In the coming year we will conduct deeper research into pay and conditions to ensure our guidance stays up to date. We will produce a fuller report with benchmarked pay recommendations.

A large, stylized teal number '01' is positioned in the bottom left corner of the page. The '0' is a simple circle, and the '1' is a vertical bar with a small horizontal base. The background behind the number is a dark purple vertical bar that runs the full height of the page.

# Our recommendations

Our recommendations from 2022 and 2024 still stand. We want to highlight our commitment to other practices that help ensure that pay is fairly distributed and that opportunities for all are in place to accelerate diversifying the sector, helping it to attract the best talent and reflecting the communities we serve.

- We recommend that employers and funders use the upper quartile of salary ranges to set salaries, regardless of the size, type or location of their institution.
- Employers and funders should not use the lower quartile ranges to set pay rates.
- We recommend that organisations undertake fair pay audits, in line with legislation and good pay practice.
- We recommend that all workers, regardless of contract type or hours of work, should at a minimum be paid the Real Living Wage set by the [Living Wage Foundation](#), which is calculated annually based on what people need to live.
- We recommend that unpaid internships should be limited to a maximum of three weeks, so that individuals may be able to apply for funding, allocate time or funds to support their development in the short-term.
- We recommend that employers embed fair and inclusive recruitment practices, ensuring that job specifications are based on competence and knowledge, and that formal qualifications are sought only where necessary for the role.
- The MA's commitment to inclusive recruitment can be found in our [guidance](#), and the following provides more specific recommendations for action. We recommend:
  - Regularly undertaking a [process review](#) to identify barriers or biases within the process, policy and their execution.
  - That all [role or job descriptions](#) and [person specifications](#) relate to the actual requirements of the role, rather than historic anomalies and that only valid and relevant criteria for short-listing are included.
  - Creating an accessible and meaningful [vacancy pack](#) that encourages people to apply, rather than creating an additional barrier. This should avoid assumptions around knowledge and understanding of particular terminology for example competency or values-based selection.

# 02

# Our recommendations

## 02

- Extending your reach through meaningful and targeted [advertising](#), acknowledging the time it takes to complete an application and what this may mean for religious holidays and festivals, the demands placed on carers and disabled applicants.
- [Adopting positive](#) action approaches as a response to understanding your current applicant, candidate and workforce [profile](#) and their relationship to your local demographic.
- That all selection activities are [designed](#) with inclusion at their heart, with anticipatory adjustments in place to support and respond to those that may need more specialist requirements.
- Prioritising the candidate experience and supporting growth by offering [feedback](#) to those participating in interviews or other selection activities.
- That all those involved in recruitment and selection are competent to do so, and have received appropriate [training and development](#) around employment law, assessment practices and equality and diversity.
- We recommend that organisations work with trade unions and staff to develop progressive working policies, terms and conditions.
- We recommend that organisations and funders consider the recruitment, remuneration and wellbeing of the workforce in a holistic way.
- Our [workforce wellbeing research](#), [Front-of-House Charter for Change](#) and [Competency Framework](#) may be used as complementary documents to this report to support progressive workforce policy.
- We recommend that funders use these guidelines to assess whether applicants for funding are paying fairly and have best practice workforce policies in place.
- Although the salary ranges in this survey do not cover freelance rates, we recommend that museums:
  - Respect and value freelancers as a core part of the sector workforce.
  - Pay on time or ahead of payment terms, recognising that cashflow for freelancers is an issue.
  - Pay fairly and avoid downward pressure on freelancers' rates because of the cost-of-living crisis. Recognise that a freelance day rate covers costs such as such as pensions, training, tax and insurance.
- We recommend that employers set aside budget for staff wellbeing initiatives and listen to and act on staff and freelance concerns in this area.

# 2025-26 update to the recommendations

03

### Our new Code of Ethics for Museums places emphasis on being equitable and inclusive, and expands this by highlighting that organisations should:

- Value the workforce, including staff, volunteers and freelancers, by ensuring fair pay, benefits and conditions. Foster a positive workplace culture to promote wellbeing.
- Commit to workforce diversity to improve the work of the museum and better represent the communities you aim to serve.

It also places emphasis on being transparent and accountable:

- When recruiting for paid roles, include information about pay and benefits in role descriptions.

These bullet points, as well as other principles within the Code should guide our thoughts around pay, terms and conditions and workforce wellbeing. This, alongside engagement with the sector, has informed our 2025-26 recommendations.

### Real Living Wage

We do not agree that individual wages within the sector should be topped up to be livable.

We recommend that all individuals are paid at least in line with the Real Living Wage.

We recommend that organisations demonstrate their commitment to the Real Living Wage by supporting the [Living Wage Foundation](#).

The MA's commitment is explicitly articulated in our 2025-2030 Business Plan – Increase campaigning around pay and conditions; use collective advocacy to achieve real living wage.

### Inclusive practice

We want a diverse UK museum sector that supports social justice priorities. This requires good recruitment and selection practice, including how we design our roles and structures:

- Providing additional support for under-represented groups.
- Prioritisation for applications where positive action is applicable, for example from carer-leavers or ex-military applicants.
- Developing working patterns that support carers, disabled people and those receiving benefits – see later.
- Paying for lived experience – see below.

### Lived experience

As outlined in our [Decolonisation Guidance](#), we believe that those who share their lived experience should be rewarded fairly for doing so. We adopt Baljeet Sandhu's 2017 definition from [The value of lived experience in social change](#):

“...as the experience(s) of people on whom a social issue, or combination of issues, has had a direct impact.”

Paying for time, insights and emotionally-laden work is critical for social justice, inclusive practice and diversifying the sector.

This is expanded within our [Working Equitably](#) guidance, which highlights good practice when working with communities.

## Wellbeing

Our 2022 research into [Workforce Wellbeing](#) highlighted that pay was in the top three factors affecting wellbeing. Knowing what you are going to be paid, when you are going to be paid and what that might mean for financial planning or survival is critical.

A specific way to ensure that poor pay practices do not have any additional impact would be to look at particularly vulnerable groups.

For example, whilst an individual working in the sector should not be required to apply for Universal Credit to create a livable wage, the benefits landscape is complex. Where there is an opportunity for individuals to work within the sector, without forfeiting any claims they are making, museums should look at the configuration of working hours.

This may be even more significant for freelancers where cash flow from multiple projects fluctuates and so organisations should support an agreed schedule for payments and rates.

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a way to develop expertise within paid work, they provide structure for development, learning from others and applying expertise in real time in a real situation.

Apprenticeships can be a way of developing talent and diversifying the workforce profile.

We recommend that, where apprenticeships are in place, wherever possible pay exceeds the legal requirements, to ensure that equitable access to pay regardless of age.

## Freelancing and freelancers

Whilst this research has not looked at freelance pay rates, the indicative salary costs can go to inform the setting of rates for briefs and tenders. It is critical to integrate and enhance the indicative salary costs where benefits of employment have a monetary value, for example this could include oncosts.

The most recent report on freelance experience within the Creative Industries is [Forging Freelance Futures](#) and it includes a number of areas for reform. They are clear that it is essential “to address the issue of low pay for freelancers and the critical need to improve diversity across the cultural and creative industries is also essential to unlock the potential for sustainable growth across our sub-sectors.”

Within this context the following are applicable and the MA would encourage organisations to review their current practice:

1. Work and pay practices including the extension of sick pay and parental leave to freelancers, providing essential parity – in terms of safety nets and support – to the terms available to traditional employees.
2. Payment protection through measures to safeguard freelancers from late payments and financial instability, including strengthening requirements for prompt payment practices.

# Salary benchmarks: 2025-26 update summary

Our figures are based on the updated 2024 research into pay scales across a variety of roles and levels of seniority, and across museums of different sizes, types and locations.

These are the upper quartile figures based on this research and are adjusted to reflect inflation. We have used Consumer Price Index and Housing (CPIH) as the most **comprehensive indicator** of inflation, as opposed to the Retail Price Index (RPI), Consumer Price Index (CPI) and within this we have also sought to explore how CPIH relates to Public Sector pay awards, acknowledging that not all museums are public sector organisations.

We have taken the 2024 data and increased it to reflect inflationary rises in 2025-26, resulting in what we would expect to see in terms of pay in the financial year 2025-26.

Our window of measurement for CPIH was in **December 2025**, at 3.6%.

Salary benchmarks*	Assistant	Officer/Co-ordinator	Supervisor/Team leader	Manager/Head of dept
Attendants/Front-of-house/Security	23,716	27,614	32,802	47,636
Museum technician/Building management	27,658	30,685	39,678	50,538
Fundraising/Marketing	27,659	33,132	43,406	54,977
Learning/Programming/Outreach	26,932	30,376	36,715	51,141
Conservators	31,441	37,404	45,935	61,351
Curators/Collections management	26,682	32,838	39,106	59,157
		Manager/Director		Director/Group director
Senior management/Directors/Group directors		78,417		96,397

These benchmarks may be used in combination with other sources of advice on pay in the sector, such as the Institute of Conservation's salaries research.

\* The cost of living varies within the UK. This figure should act as a baseline before London weighting, regional variants and markets are taken into account

**Front cover image:** Pitt Rivers Museum,  
University of Oxford. Photograph by  
Ian Wallman.