Student Volunteers in York Museums

Final Report

November 2005

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1 Introduction

Phase 1 of the project, from 1st October 2004 to the 28th February 2005 involved interviewing museum personnel and searching the literature to establish good practice in the recruitment, training and deployment of volunteers. Information was also obtained from potential student volunteers to establish what might interest and motivate them to work at museums and from volunteers of all types who had recently worked at several museums in York to identify their perceptions of volunteer work. A report on this work was submitted in March 2005.

Phase 2 of the project, from 1st March to 31st August 2005, concentrated on arranging the placements for the volunteers, monitoring their experiences in the museums, analysing the findings and preparing this final report.

Through negotiations between the Active York office at the University of York and a number of York museums, a range of placements were arranged for eight female student volunteers in five museums.

The students included in this survey undertook a range of volunteering which demonstrate the diverse activities offered by the five museums. These included:

- helping to plan and prepare special displays;
- participating in occasional events including historical and costume re-enactments,
- assisting with educational visits;
- being room stewards/hosts or explainers;
- carrying out oral history interviews;
- working as a receptionist;
- working in a museum shop;
- assisting a visiting artist; and
- carrying out local history research.

Two approaches were adopted to gain an insight into the variety of experiences of the students:

1 Students were interviewed
2 Students completed a log book.

Findings from these two sources were analysed to identify best practice in supporting museum volunteering and to understand the motivations and rewards accruing to students who undertake this type of volunteering. Thus the work of York museums and the student volunteering scheme may be advanced by this pilot project.

2
2 Research methods

2.1 Data Collection

2.1.1 Interviews
Four student volunteers (three female and one male) were employed to interview the student museum volunteers towards the end of their volunteering time in late June - early July. They were provided with an interview schedule which is presented in Appendix I.

2.1.2 Student Log Books
Students volunteering in the museums were requested to complete a Log Book recording their experiences for each session that they undertook. In some cases this was a regular weekly involvement of some hours or a full day while for other volunteers the commitment was irregular and linked to particular events within their chosen museum. The Log Book was divided into three sections:

1. ‘In the beginning’ which requested some background on the individual, their motivation and aspirations;
2. ‘Session records’ in which students were asked to complete one page for each of the sessions in their museum.
3. ‘End statement’ where students were asked to provide a retrospective view of their experiences and reflections.

Four students completed their log books by the end of the Summer Term. Others will be completing theirs in October but they will not be in time to be included in this report. A blank copy of the Log Book is given in Appendix II.

2.2 Data analysis
Data from the eight interviews were collated and are presented question by question in the results section 3.1.

Data from four log books together with additional information from the interviews were used to prepare sample case studies of the experiences of a range of students. These are presented in section 3.2.
3 Results

3.1 Interviews with student volunteers

Table 1 Students, their degree subjects and their museum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Degree subject</th>
<th>Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>History MA</td>
<td>National Railway Museum (NRM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>History of Art</td>
<td>Art Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Treasurer’s House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Fairfax House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Barley Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Barley Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>National Railway Museum (NRM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>History of At</td>
<td>Art Gallery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All students were female.

[In the following questions note that students often gave more than one answer]

Background

Q1 Why did you wish to volunteer in a museum?

The eight students presented a range of motivations for wishing to volunteer in a museum and most gave several reasons. The detail of the responses included responses which also answered question 2 below. The responses are reported as given for each question.

Four had chosen museum volunteering because it related to their degree subjects, for example History and History of Art. One had a specific interest in museum work as a career, another: ‘...would quite like to go on and have a career in that area’ [History of Art] while a third explained: ‘... because I have a job in leisure and tourism and I wanted to see whether the sub-heritage section was similar, and whether maybe, as a future career I might like to look into it.’

Three respondents mentioned wishing or needing to undertake some work experience. This was a particularly strong driver for History of Art students, as one explained: ‘they keep saying that if you want to do any sort of work in a gallery or museum later on then work experience is really, really necessary.’
Enjoyment was a reason given by two students and one of these was also looking for: ‘Something different to do, get out of the University a bit.’

One student was attracted to museum volunteering by a particular project that was underway. She added: It’s a really, kind of unique opportunity to work with a really major museum and use the skills of Oral History training and things like that.

Prior experience influenced one volunteer who had been to one of the museums for some of their special events and had liked the place and the idea of working there. She also said:

‘I thought that would probably be the best place because it’s sort of a small organisation and it’s a charity so I thought they would probably benefit from my volunteering and my help more than other places.’

Q2 Which museum are you working in?
Table 2 shows the museums in which student volunteers worked and the activities offered to them.

Table 2 Distribution of students in museums and types of volunteering undertaken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Volunteer input</th>
<th>Number of student volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Gallery</td>
<td>Special activities run by outside artists</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley Hall</td>
<td>Mostly regular core duties with occasional special events</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax House and Treasurer’s House</td>
<td>Regular rotas as room hosts/stewards</td>
<td>Two (one in each museum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRM</td>
<td>Projects organised with teams of volunteers with irregular input</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3 Why did you choose this museum?
Most students gave several reasons for choosing a particular museum. [As described above, there is some overlap with responses to Question 1 and those points will not be reiterated.]

Liking the museum was important to half the respondents. One for example was already a member of the National Trust: ‘So I’ve been around a few National Trust properties so I knew what I was letting myself in for.’ This student also mentioned that it had been easy
to become involved: 'I just sent them an e-mail and they sent me a form back and it was set up for you being a volunteer.' Another student explained her several reasons: 'I visited it and it was very small and friendly and seemed really nice and they had research to do which is what I'm most interested in doing.'

Three students were interested in the particular opportunities on offer; one, as described above, to join an oral history project while another explained:

'Well it was probably less to do with the actual [X] museum itself as it was to do with the nature of the project when I saw the brief. Because it was quite a creative project and something that you can put a lot of your own initiative into.'

In summary answers given to Questions 1, 2 and 3 show that student motivation, even for this small case study sample, is complex and relates to aspects of their lives which vary from individual to individual. Reasons included the subject area of the museum, its links to the students' degree work, career considerations, accessibility, friendliness, size, activities and projects on offer, and the opportunity for an enjoyable, rewarding involvement.

Q4 When did you start?
Student involvement was in two phases. In the Autumn Term 2004 two joined an Oral History Project at the NRM and the six others started in the Summer Term 2005.

Q5 How often do you go and for how long?
The timing and amount of student involvement was determined, for the most part, by the nature of the work they volunteered to do. The two who were room stewards (at Fairfax House and the Treasurer's House) worked a set number of hours per week. Student involvement at the other museums was a mixture of routine help and also assisting with occasional special events. The flexibility of the involvement at the NRM was explained by one student:

'It depends, it's not like I go and do so many hours per week at the museum. Normally we go up to the museum when we have got meetings with ... our supervisors to discuss new aspects of the project. So I would say we would normally be up there at least once a month for an hour meeting or something. Then we had this 'Sixty Years of Peace' event where we did spend ... someone was there every Monday, Wednesday Friday or Saturday to man like a sort of display there.'
Some volunteering work at a different museum was carried out during the University Easter break and one respondent reduced her involvement from twice a week to once a week when the Summer Term started.

Role

Q6 What are your main activities that you are involved in at the moment?
The activities undertaken by students varied somewhat but the major part of their work involved interacting with visitors:

- Two volunteers were room stewards or hosts
- Two worked in the reception and shop and helped with school parties
- Two conducted oral history interviews and helped with planning and hosting displays
- Two assisted with community arts projects involving children.

Additionally one helped by doing some research for special events and another by running errands.

Q7 Which activities do you find the easiest?
Three respondents perceived the easiest aspect as the activity itself:

‘I mean I really like art and craft, so I really enjoyed getting stuck in and doing bits and pieces and helping out with that sort of stuff.’

‘At the moment, talking to people and interviewing them is really, really lovely... they are all really interesting and such lovely people that I’ve met [sic], so that’s probably the easiest bit.’

‘I would say that just sitting around the displays and chatting to people is the easiest.’

One student felt that her role was neither easy nor difficult and another that all was easy.

Other respondents reported specific activities that involved less demanding tasks such as answering easy questions, helping in the shop or setting up and packing away for events.

Q8 Are there any activities expected of you that are difficult in any way?
The volunteers had had few difficulties. Only three mentioned some minor concerns.
Two found the initial stages the hardest; one explained ‘It wasn’t too hard but there is always that slight nerve racking bit at the beginning’ while the other felt that they had been ‘thrown in at the deep end in a kind of way because none of us had ever done anything like this before and we started right from scratch. So, finding our feet was probably the hardest bit I think.’

The third had found children’s groups noisy and hard work. She had also done some research and thought it was ‘quite hard finding exactly what they want.’

Q9  Do you feel that your strengths are being utilised?
All volunteers felt that their strengths were being utilised although two did qualify their responses, for example one explained ‘I guess, probably not to the maximum. I think it takes time for them to get to know you and give you more responsibilities.’ The other recognised that not all an individual’s strengths would be required for aspects of volunteering and was happy with that.

Q10  In what ways are your skills being developed through this volunteering?
A range of skills enhancements were identified by the students. Three mentioned people or interpersonal skills, two communication and two the different skills needed when working with children. One person had improved her interviewing, communication and networking skills and valued having ‘a chance to discuss things with professionals at the museum and be taken seriously.’ Others mentioned project organisation, research skills and gaining a technical craft skill. One volunteer was not asked this question.

Q11  How much would you say that you are enjoying volunteering?
Students were offered four options:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Seven students were very positive about their volunteering and chose ‘A lot’. Two typical responses were ‘Oh it’s been fun. I really enjoy it.’ and ‘Yes, I’m loving it. It’s really great.’ One responded ‘Most of the time’.

Q12  In what ways do you or don’t you feel confident in your role in the museum?
Although all volunteers reported that they were confident or confident most of the time, there were a few qualifications. Two mentioned that they were a bit daunted at the beginning. They were a little worried that they would be asked questions that they could not answer although they knew that there were other people or resources of information that they could turn to.
The most confident responded:

'I am pretty much alright. I mean in a way there are ten of us, different people to bring different skills and we work really well together as a team. So if there are things that I am less good at someone else is better at it than me and we all share our role.'

Another felt that accomplishing goals improved confidence.

Induction and support

Q13 What induction training did you have?

All the volunteers received initial training or induction. The nature and length of the induction varied from about an hour and a half to a full day depending on the size of the museum and the nature of the work expected from the volunteers. The National Railway Museum, for example, provided a full day’s induction for a number of volunteers working on several different projects. In contrast the small museums or projects provided more individual induction. One student missed the formal one day induction at the NRM due to illness but said ‘That was OK. I got all the notes from people and people were very kind of good at telling me what went on and stuff like that.’

In all cases museum staff carried out the induction. At the National Railway Museum joint induction and training was provided by museum staff and a representative from Active York (University of York).

Three volunteers mentioned that they were introduced to other staff and/or volunteers when they received their initial induction.

All students were satisfied that their initial induction was helpful and appropriate to their volunteering role. The full day induction at the NRM was summarised by the recipient as ‘a really brilliant induction actually. Really well done.’ In another very small museum the approach was:

‘very much geared towards what I wanted to get out of the experience. ... Then it was mainly sort of telling me what I needed to tell the visitors ... It was quite simple stuff and, of course, showing me around the place and making sure I knew where everything was.’
Q14 Was this followed up in any way?
Seven of the participants received no further formal training and they felt that there was no need. One perceived that the work she did as part of a project was ‘more kind of on the job’ training because ‘you can’t really learn interviewing without actually going out and doing some interviews.’ Three others mentioned that museum staff checked with them at the end of each session or activity that they were happy and asked whether they needed any other help.

Three monthly training is provided by the National Trust but the student volunteering at the Treasurer’s House would have missed that as it was timetabled for the students’ summer break.

Q15 Other than training, in what ways have you been supported by the museum staff in general?
All volunteers were supported by the museum staff. Typical responses to this question were:

‘Just generally they are there to help if you have any queries.’

‘Well X at the museum has been really our number one supporter of the project because he is always checking up on how things are going. He is always praising what we have done and saying how pleased he is. ... he talked to us and clarified any problems we had.’

‘It was nice. No sort of set support given but just general friendly working atmosphere really.’

Q16 Do you have much contact with other staff or volunteers at the museum?
All volunteers had some contacts with museum staff. The extent depended on the institution and the nature of the voluntary work. Thus students working at the Art Gallery and the NRM on project-based initiatives largely met and worked with the artists or staff responsible for the particular projects for example, Community Arts and Oral History. In smaller museums where volunteers were doing more core work there was a close working relationship with all of the staff.

Contact with other volunteers also varied with the nature of the work. Thus, for example, two students in one museum worked in a team of ten and so saw other volunteers regularly. In the two museums where the volunteers’ role was to be a room host, the students met with other volunteers before and after their sessions, during a mid-duty break and could also sometimes talk to the person in the next room when there were few visitors.
Links with your degree/and/or career

Q17 Which, if any, of your activities link with your degree programme?

Four students each identified an activity that linked with their degree in some way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Room steward in the Treasurer’s House</td>
<td>History - History and Heritage module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research for Barley Hall</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferable skills gained with the Sixty Years of Peace display at the NRM</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with children in the Art Gallery community artist events</td>
<td>History of Art - Educational aspects of museum studies and museum curation module</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three volunteers thought that there was no link and one was not sure.

Q18 Was this intentional?

Four students intentionally chose their museum volunteering to link with their degree and two did not. The question was not applicable for the student who was not sure whether there was a link with her degree and one student was not asked this question.

Q19 Which if any, activities link with your career?

Although most students did not have firm career plans, six did suggest that they would be interested in a career linked to their volunteer activity and five of these career possibilities were in the museums, heritage or arts fields. The sixth (a history student) was interested in research without limiting that to museum work.

One student, who was undecided about her career, had found the experience helpful in deciding what career she did not want:

‘Well I've decided I'll probably won't [sic] have a career in the heritage sector now but at least I've explored it so I know that's not really for me. But as well as finding out more about a possible future career there is this transferable skills again which employers are looking for. I was joint treasurer of the project so that is some numeracy stuff which I think will be useful for employers.’

Another student also mentioned the value of the transferable skills, such as ability to communicate, organise and plan, that she had gained through museum volunteering.
Q20  Was that intentional?
Six students responded that it had been intentional to be involved in activities that linked with their career possibilities. Two students were not asked this question.

Q21  Has your experience at the museum shaped or influenced what you might like to do in the future?
Six students had found that the museum experience had been helpful in influencing their career direction; five did wish to follow the museums, heritage or arts route while one did not (see above).

Two students were still uncertain but thought that it might:

‘I’m not certain exactly what I’m going to do but it certainly has given me something else to think about for a career, definitely.’

‘Not so far. But I think it might do. Just in terms of knowing about how things work in a museum and things.’

Overview
Q22  What do you think that you have learnt from this experience?
The answers to this question fell into several types and mostly centred around skills gained:

- People skills, such as how to deal with the public and work in a group (6 students).
- Specific skills – interviewing, oral history, managing archives (2 students)
- How museums work including their educational side (2 students)
- Transferable skills such as planning (1 student)
- About the specific museum and its contents (1 student)
- About York’s history (1 student).

23 Do you think your involvement is valued by the museum?
All students were positive that the museums had been appreciative of their work as volunteers. Typical responses were:

‘Yes I really do think … X has been so positive about all the work that we have done. So I think they really do appreciate it too. They have been brilliant and very supportive of the University project.’
'Definitely, definitely with the people I was directly involved with. I've actually been asked ... the artist has asked me to do another project with children in August. Really nice.'

'Yes, completely. ...we e-mailed him [museum supervisor] some of our transcripts of memories and stuff like that. And he was absolutely thrilled, he was over the moon because we had managed to talk to people and find out things that he wanted to know.'

24 What would you say was the best thing for you about your experience of volunteering in the museum?
Students presented a variety of ‘best things’ which included:

- developing a new skill (how to judge how much information to give to individual visitors);
- doing something interesting;
- doing something helpful;
- positive responses from visitors and from staff;
- meeting new people;
- learning how hard people’s lives were during WWII;
- gaining an insight into what goes on in museums.

25 What would you say was the worst thing for you about your experience of volunteering in the museum?
Five respondents said that they had found their experience very rewarding although one had been a little stressed at the beginning of the project by how much needed to be done. Another had really enjoyed her volunteering and only wished that her involvement could have gone for the whole term [rather than just for two weeks in the vacation].

The three others had very largely enjoyed their volunteering but each mentioned one less enjoyable aspect: one had found it a bit dull when the museum was quiet; another was concerned about not knowing what to say to visitors and a third found it a little bit tedious when interviewees talk off-topic at length.

26 Would you recommend museum volunteering to a friend?
All students said that they would recommend volunteering to a friend and three expanded on their positive responses:
'Yes definitely. I know a lot of people who would probably enjoy it. It’s a nice combination of learning about things and knowing about things and talking to people.’

'Yes definitely. I mean I think I got a lot of benefit from it and I would recommend it to anyone else.’

'... yes, I definitely would, yes. If they were in a position to obviously because some students would much rather get some money in.’

27 If so, what advice would you give them?
Five of the student volunteers provided a variety of helpful suggestions:

- Find a museum that best suits and interests you
- Visit the museum in advance to see if you like it
- Know/learn something about the subject area of the museum
- If you are doing a project within a museum, set deadlines and stick to them and always leave more time than you think to complete the work
- Have confidence in what you are doing
- The more chatty you are and get involved the more you enjoy it
- Be open-minded about the things you might be doing.

Two respondents did not know what to recommend and one was not asked this question.

28 Are there any other points that you would like to make?
Five students did not have any further points that they wished to raise and one was not asked the question.

One did mention that the volunteer experience did depend on how friendly the staff and other volunteers were. She did emphasise that in her case they had been friendly. She also said that her experience had been:

'good, but it can be quite awkward at times as well, because volunteering is completely different in the sense that they can’t train you in the way they would if you were working for money.’
3.2 Case studies

3.2.1 Student A
A is a History student doing an MA in Representations and Contexts. She volunteered at the National Railway Museum from November 2004 to May 2005 and completed 11 sessions in her log book. She was interviewed on the 23rd of June.

Motivation
A volunteered because she was interested in working in museums in the future. She chose the NRM because of their Oral History Project which ‘sounded like a good opportunity to work with people and learn about their experiences.’ She explained that oral history projects are quite rare and that it was a ‘unique opportunity to work in a really major museum and use the skills of Oral History training and things like that.’

Qualities and expectations
A felt that she had certain qualities and skills to bring to the project. These included organisational ability, confidence, team working, getting things done and experience in making posters. She was hoping to learn what it was like to work in a museum, how to create an archive for people in the future and the chance to use her history knowledge in a practical way.

Work
A was part of a team that included volunteers, museum staff and a representative from Active York, who planned the project, including an exhibition, from beginning to end. The stages included meeting other members of the team; establishing the aims of the project; sharing responsibilities; brainstorming; writing a plan and a budget; obtaining funding; interviewing older York residents in various venues and staffing the exhibition.

Training and Support
A was unable to attend the formal induction day due to illness but found that very helpful training and support was provided by the museum staff, volunteers, and Active York staff throughout the project. She felt that the ongoing training had ‘helped us create a successful project!’ She also wrote that the level of support ‘was good - the Active York representative was always there when we needed help, and we developed a good relationship with the museum staff & were able to contact them for advice.’

Reflections
Although A had felt a bit ‘scary’ at initial meetings and had been disappointed at a couple of sessions when it had not been possible to recruit York people to interview, she was very
pleased with the overall experience. She felt that she had learnt a lot about museums and interviewing people, had gained confidence to approach people and talk to them and had learnt how to plan and run a successful project. She was really pleased when she was told by the NRM staff that some of the stories the team had collected had brought useful, new knowledge to the museum and that they were pleased about this. She summed up her experience as: *It was a lovely project, a pleasure to be involved in, & I hope it keeps running for years to come!*  

**Level of satisfaction**

A rated five sessions as *Excellent*, three as *Good*, one as *Satisfactory* and the two when they were unable to recruit individuals to be interviewed as *Disappointing*.

### 3.2.2 Student C

C, a first year History student, volunteered at the Treasurer’s House, a National Trust (NT) property. She worked for seven weekly sessions from 9th May 2005 to 27th June, each one lasting from 3¼ to 3¾ hours. She filled in her log book for each of these sessions and was interviewed on 28th June.

**Motivation**

C had several reasons for choosing to volunteer at the Treasurer’s House. Partly she wished to do something different outside the University but within her subject area. Additionally she was considering looking for employment in the museum sector after university. She chose the Treasurer’s House because she was already a member of the National Trust and had previously visited and enjoyed this museum. She also found that it was easy to apply and be accepted as a volunteer with the NT.

**Qualities and expectations**

The contribution that she felt she brought to the museum were an interest in and a knowledge of history as well as a friendly, reliable and trustworthy character. Additionally she had had some previous experience of dealing with the general public. C was hoping to gain some insights into the workings of a National Trust house and to learn new things.

**Work**

The core duty was as a room steward in different rooms at different times. Mostly this involved looking after the rooms and their contents, ensuring visitor safety and answering visitors’ questions about the house and its history. She also helped with handing out the audio guides and explaining how they work. On another day she helped children with a quiz about pests and went on a (plastic) pest trap hunt with them. Mostly C worked with other volunteers or on her own.
Training and Support
Training involved an afternoon session prior to starting duties and a tour round the house. C rated this as excellent. She was provided with a folder of information about the rooms. Other volunteers also helped and advised they also checked at each session that everything was alright. After some months volunteers go for a review meeting and follow up training but as this was over the university summer break C was not available for this.

Reflections
C enjoyed her volunteer work although she felt on her first session that she had rather been ‘dropped in at the deep end’. Nonetheless this session was rated ‘excellent’. She quickly learnt her duties and how to deal with visitors’ questions. Gains from the volunteering were developing people skills, an insight into how a NT property works and knowledge and experiences that will enhance her understanding of some of the issues in her module on History and Heritage. She feels that these will help her in other areas of life and in future employment.

Level of satisfaction
C rated six of her seven sessions as ‘good’ and the first one as ‘excellent’.
She described the people that she worked with as ‘all lovely & friendly’. She felt that the duties could sometimes become monotonous or dull if the rooms were quiet or visitors did not wish to talk.

3.2.3 Student F
F is a second year, English student. She volunteered at Barley Hall from 5th May to 23rd June 2005 and worked one day a week at the museum and an extra half day at half term. She completed the log book for 9 sessions and was interviewed on 27th June.

Motivation
F had been thinking about doing some volunteering in part to get some work experience. She had been to Barley Hall for some of the special events that they do and quite liked the place and the idea of working there. She thought ‘that would probably be the best place because it’s sort of a small organisation and it’s a charity so I thought they would probably benefit from my volunteering and my help more than other places.’

Qualities and expectations
F felt that she was good with people, including children, well organised and punctual; qualities that she could bring to the museum. She was looking to gain experience of working with different kinds of people and improve her confidence.
Work
Her responsibilities were diverse and varied from week to week. Those involving people included greeting visitors on reception, handling and explaining the audio-guides, staffing the shop which involved learning to use the till and on one occasion helping with a school party. There were also more domestic tasks in tidying and cleaning the hall, and running errands. F was soon asked to help with creating a flyer and was ‘pleased to be approached about doing promo material on my 2nd day.’ On her third day she was asked to do some retail research which involved working out retail space and learning to do a retail matrix on the computer. Working with the children involved making wall hangings and doing building games in the morning and preparing for Tudor week in the afternoon by making masks and braiding looms. On another half day she helped with a special teachers’ day during Tudor week. Towards the end of her volunteering she and another volunteer were asked to help prepare a new audio-guide for the visually-impaired.

Training and Support
During the first three weeks she was supported by the museum’s volunteer co-ordinator. Otherwise there was always someone on hand to help with queries and she found the staff very approachable. F felt that she had had as much training as she needed as the tasks were not difficult. The museum has a volunteer information pack.

Reflections
F enjoyed the various tasks that she was asked to do and particularly valued being asked to help with the flyer and working with the children’s group. She was interested to learn a little about retail research. She felt that she had gained in inter-personal skills including interaction with visitors and working as part of a team with other staff which was a new experience. She did feel however that she would like to do more than shop work which was all she had to do at several sessions. She would like to do more office or behind the scenes work next year.

F also felt that she had ‘also begun to gain an insight into the running of an organisation like Barley Hall which may well influence my career choice.’

Level of satisfaction
F rated her eight full days as ‘Excellent’ and her half day as ‘Good’. She particularly enjoyed meeting and talking to the visitors and also the people she works with. Being part of York’s tourist industry was also satisfying in a small way. She plans to return to the museum in the Autumn Term and to work with the York Students in Schools project.
3.2.4 Student G

G is a second year English and Related Literature student who volunteered to work in the National Railway Museum from 24th November 2004 to 20th June 2005. She completed her log book for seven sessions including the preliminary meeting on 24th November and was interviewed on 29th June.

Motivation

G wished to ‘explore heritage work as a potential future career and thought that working on a project in partnership with a national museum would give me invaluable experience to this end.’ She chose the particular project because it aimed to preserve people’s memories of the railways during World War II and she thought it ‘hugely important to record these reminiscences before they are lost for good.’ She was also attracted by the variety and scope described in the project brief.

Qualities and expectations

G explained that she had a passionate interest in history and enjoyed talking to people face to face which was an important aspect of the work. She also has some IT experience which she hoped to use to build a website for the project. The chance to gain some enhanced transferable skills, such as communication and teamwork, from the volunteering as well as some personal development were important opportunities for G. She expected that the project would also help her to meet new people, make some potentially useful contacts for the future and give her a chance to experience the York community beyond the University campus.

Work

G and other volunteers were part of the NRM Oral History Project. This involved recruiting and interviewing people about their experiences during the war and typing up the interview transcripts. Additionally volunteers prepared a display for the ‘60 Years Ago’ event celebrating the anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day. They then staffed the display board for two hours on four days in a week and talked to interested passers by and potential interviewees.

Training and Support

The induction day (for G and others) was excellent (‘really brilliant’) and provided an invaluable insight and positive guidance for working on the Oral History Project. The topics covered included project management, the responsibility of the museum to their volunteers and vice versa, clarifying short and long-term goals, practical advice on interviewing and information on creating public displays. After the induction day the museum staff and other
more experienced volunteers continued to give a high level of support and were consistently encouraging with positive debriefing sessions.

**Reflections**
This volunteering has been a very positive experience for G and even better than she hoped. She reported that she had acquired valuable transferable skills, enhanced her CV, learnt a great deal from talking to York’s elderly residents and more than ever appreciate the value of oral history. Other aspects that had been important were working to deadlines, having regular updates, being part of a team, problem solving and effective group communication. G was not sure that she would pursue a career in museum work but nonetheless had found the volunteering a valuable experience.

**Level of satisfaction**
G rated two of her seven sessions as ‘Excellent’, four as ‘Good’ and one as ‘Satisfactory’.

In summary – *The NRM Oral History Project has been a really fulfilling and worthwhile experience - I’m so glad that I got involved.*
4 Discussion
Judged by the responses of the eight students the museums volunteering project has been very successful. In particular students valued their training and induction and opportunities to practise and develop a range of interpersonal skills.

4.1 Student motivation
Different features of museums are attractive to different students; for example one volunteer was pleased to be involved in a project in the NRM - a major national museum while another preferred to be part of a very small museum – Barley Hall. Some students chose their museum because it links to their degree and/or career aspirations but others did not. For some, perceptions of the museum as being an interesting place to work or prior knowledge of what goes on within it, affect their choice of volunteering opportunity. Gaining generic skills (communications, project management, team work, etc.) that could transfer to any career are also recognised as worthwhile.

Gaining confidence in a new sphere is important to certain volunteers. Having some creative input is also valued.

4.2 Training and induction
All volunteers received induction appropriate to the work in which they were involved and subsequent on-going support. The training day organised by the NRM was particularly highly praised. Although this is a large, national museum and is able to provide high profile guest speakers as well as internal staff for such induction, its approach could still provide a model of good practice for smaller museums. Students appreciated regular contact with museum staff and with other volunteers where this was available.

All students felt that their strengths were being utilised and that their contributions to their museum were valued.

4.3 Experience
All students were well received in their chosen museum. Staff and other volunteers were friendly and supportive.

A major part of the experience for most volunteers was the opportunity to interact with members of the general public or visitors. Through this, students felt they had a chance to develop sets of interpersonal skills for example in interviewing, talking, explaining, guiding and answering questions.
Many of them felt these skills would transfer to other situations and/or be valuable after they leave University. Social interaction with visitors/the public was the most frequently mentioned aspiration when we interviewed prospective volunteers in Phase 1 of the project and so it seems that, in most cases, these aspirations have been well met.

4.4 Good practice

In our first report we identified a number of recommendations. These were based on our primary research and on best practice as identified in the literature. These recommendations were:

**4.4.1** Institutions wishing to develop new volunteer programmes utilise the information presented in Table 5.1 (in the March report) *Recommendations for developing a Volunteer Programme*.

**4.4.2** Institutions that already have volunteer programmes in place may wish to consider the information presented in Table 5.1 (in the March report) as it may enhance their own programmes.

**4.4.3** Institutions may wish to utilise some or all of documentation and forms listed in Table 3.22 (in the March report) as models for best practice.

**4.4.4** Institutions could benefit by buying a copy of *The Handbook for Heritage Volunteer Managers and Administrators* by Peter Walton 1999 British Association of Friends of Museums.

**4.4.5** Institutions should consider the needs and interests of the different age groups they employ. Students especially should not be out of pocket for the volunteering they do.

**4.4.6** Institutions should consider advertising details of what they have to offer on relevant databases.
4.4.7 University departments should encourage their students to volunteer in ways that will support their interests and personal development as well as enhancing their transferable skills and career prospects.

Following this second phase of research we would like to add a further six recommendations:

4.4.8 Where there are few volunteers or volunteers working alone, institutions might consider ways of checking on and supporting volunteers on a day to day or regular basis, particularly in the early part of their placements.

4.4.9 Institutions may wish to ensure that training opportunities are planned to take account of students’ vacation times and/or that alternative dates of training are known to students when they start placements.

4.4.10 The list of recommendations for new volunteers that were identified by these student volunteers (see responses to question 27 on page 14 of this report) could be issued to all new student volunteers in museums.

4.4.11 The students involved in this project are good ambassadors for volunteering in museums and they and/or the findings of this report should be communicated to the wider student body.

4.4.12 Institutions that have not previously made great use of students as volunteers (e.g. the York Museums Trust) should consider doing so and should maintain regular contact with the University so that opportunities that arise can be regularly advertised to the student body.

4.4.13 In view of the high value placed by students on volunteering, University Departments should consider how they will promote and encourage volunteering, especially in museums. Departments should make clear to their students the benefits of volunteering to their Professional Development, enhancement of their transferable skills and their career prospects.
Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to the staff at museums that supported the project and supplied us with information and helped distribute questionnaires. Particular thanks are due to the eight students who formed the focus of this research. Their boundless enthusiasm in recording and communicating their experiences has helped us identify what was of most value and importance.

Most importantly of all we would like to thank Heather Richardson of Active York without whom much of this work would not have been possible.
Appendix I

Students in York Museums Project

Interviews with volunteers - Summer 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student being interviewed</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of interviewer</td>
<td>Start time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finish time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background
Why did you wish to volunteer in a museum?

Which museum are you working in?

Why did you choose this museum?

When did you start?

How often do you go and for how long?

Role
What are the main activities that you are involved in at the museum?

Which activities do you find the easiest?

Are there any activities expected of you that are difficult in any way? (Details)

Do you feel that your strengths are being utilised?

In what ways do you feel that your skills are being developed through this volunteering?

How much are you enjoying your museum volunteering?

| a lot | most of the time | some of the time | not at all. |

In what ways do you or don't you feel confident in your role in the museum?

Induction and support
What induction training did you have?

Was this followed up in any way? (Details)

Other than training, in what ways have you been supported by the museum staff in general?

Do you have much contact with other staff or volunteers at the museum? (Details)
Links with your degree and/or career
Which, if any, of your activities link with your degree programme?
Was this intentional?

Which, if any, activities link with your career aspirations?
Was this intentional?

Has your experience at the museum shaped or influenced what you might like to do in the future?

Overview
What do you think that you have learnt from this experience?
Do you feel your involvement is valued by the museum? (Details)

What would you say was the best thing for you about your experience of volunteering in the museum?
What would you say was the worst thing for you about your experience of volunteering in the museum?

Would you recommend museum volunteering to a friend?
If so, what advice would you give them?

Are there any other points that you would like to make?

Many thanks for your help with this project
Appendix II Log book

Student Volunteers in York Museums
Volunteering Log Book

Student: ______________________________

Museum: ______________________________

Purpose of the Log Book

It is planned that this Log Book will:

1. Support and enhance your time as a volunteer in the museum.

2. Provide us with feedback on your progress and the progress of the project as a whole. This will feed into the long term plans for student volunteering in York museums.

We would, therefore, be grateful if you could complete as many parts of the book as fit your volunteering experience. We would like to know about what is actually happening as you become involved with your museum and also how you feel about this and reflections on your experiences.

Completing this Log Book may contribute to your skills accreditation within your department. Check your departmental guidelines/handbook or ask your supervisor.

You can use an electronic copy of this Log Book if you wish.

Organisation of the Log Book

There are three main sections:

- ‘In the beginning’
- Session records (please complete as many as possible)
- End statement
Section 1: In the beginning

Some background information about yourself:

Degree: ______________________                        Year of course: _____

Motivation - why are you interested in volunteering in a museum?

Why did you choose this particular museum/museum project?

What do you hope to gain from the experience?

What qualities and/or skills do you feel that you bring to this work?

How much time do you plan to commit to the museum volunteering?

Have you any concerns about the volunteering?

Any other comments?
Section 2: Session records

Please complete one page for each session that you do in a museum. This could be one hour, a few hours or a full day. If the questions do not exactly fit your experience, please give us the nearest equivalent information. Please feel free to write on the back of this page or type an additional one if you need more space.

Date________________    Session number:  __________

Length of session____________________

What work or duties did you carry out?

Who did you work with (paid staff, other volunteers, other)?

Who helped you (paid staff, other volunteers, other)?

What was the nature of the help that you received?

Personal reflections. Please tell us how you felt about the experience (Successes, new learning, new or developed skills, constraints, what could have been better, etc.)

How would you rate your level of satisfaction with this session (please tick):

Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Disappointing  Very disappointing
Section 3: End statement

Here we would like a retrospective, overview of your experience and reflections.

How did you find your induction and/or ongoing training?

What are your feelings about the level of support that you received?

What were the most important things that you learnt?

Did the experience meet your personal agenda and/or wishes?

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

How might you use what you have learnt in other spheres such as; your degree, in your CV or elsewhere?

Any other comments?

Thank you very much for your contribution to this project