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Training staff in the National Art Library

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Abstract:

As the number of online electronic products increase, our students, scholars, and public become more enamored with the ease of access of going online for their information needs rather than turning to the library. Even when the library has paid for the database and negotiated the license to make it available, users are unlikely to understand that the origin of this information is different than other electronic products available free on the web. Libraries with their centuries of accumulated print collections are in danger of becoming warehouses visited only by the hopelessly romantic who cling to the physical book over the monitor.

Hearing our institutional leaders deny funding for expansion of library space because "everything will soon be electronic", and watching students settle for information from popular journals available in full-text online rather than search out the scholarly treatments in a less convenient format, must sound the battle cry for all librarians to engage in the instructional process.

Partnering with teaching faculty or offering workshops in association with popular exhibitions can create new supporters and users for our libraries. Supporters who will help when budgets are imperiled or space wars break out.

1. **Introduction -** The National Art Library has been an educational institution since its inception. Training has always been a part of its fabric. The Library is equally strong in its two

chief categories: that of staff providing training and of staff receiving training. This workshop presentation will concentrate on the training the National Art Library provides for its staff. Training is provided for staff in terms of their professional development; to enable them to bring more to their present jobs in the Library as well as advance in the profession. Provision is made through the Library's Training Officer supported by the Museum's Training Section. Close co-ordination between the Training section and the Library ensures that a wide variety of training needs are covered. But resource constraints are affecting the Library's ability to continue providing access to a high standard of external training. The question for this workshop is: what approach should the Library take in the future?

2. **Museum Training Section** is a part of the Personnel Department and is responsible for the professional development of all Museum staff. This is done by the following:

2.1 **Induction -** Staff joining the Museum as Curatorial Assistants, the basic curator or professional grade, belong to a training grade. They are provided with an initial programme of induction into all the Museum's curatorial functions.

2.2 **On-Site Training -** first line management; team working; project management; &c.

2.3 **Self-learning centre -** well-equipt with interactive programmes from touch-typing to personal effectiveness and management. The Library has bought software for HTML training which is used to provide tuition to all Library staff.

2.4 **External management courses** involving some weeks at residential centres are paid for by Personnel for senior managers on the recommendation of Department heads.

2.5 **IT** has revolutionized the workplace and brought with it the need to ensure that all librarians are adequately educated to take advantage of developments and also to use their knowledge to raise the standards of information literacy of the Library's users. The Museum pays for all basic entry-level IT training – network system & e-mail; word-processing; spreadsheets; &c.

2.6 **Budget -** Personnel Department provides Museum departments with their own training budgets. Only the Library administers its Training budget independently. I shall address the uses to which this budget is put later on.

3. **Library Training**

3.1 **Induction** - All joining the Library are given a comprehensive induction. This is tailored to the post they are to fill. Senior staff are given a week of meetings and induction which allows them to meet other members of staff and have demonstrated to them the various departmental functions. Curatorial Assistants are given an induction over three weeks. In each of these weeks the first two days are spent in the department which is to be their home for up to the next two years. The remainder of each week is spent in all of the other major departments in turn. This is intended to provide a solid grounding and insight into the work of the Library, and a preparation for future rotation into other departments. It also allows them to integrate quickly.

3.2 **Operational -** Much of the Library's day-to-day training is done in terms of new staff or staff taking on new responsibilities. For example, staff new to the information points in the

Reading Rooms will shadow an experienced librarian on the Counter or Enquiry Desk until judged by Public Services managers to be sufficiently skilled. This has an additional advantage: providing staff with an opportunity to better understand their own work by teaching others.

3.3 **Rotation** - The first professional librarian grade in the National Art Library is a training grade, and these Curatorial Assistants or Assistant Librarians will have the opportunity to work in all Library departments and sections.

Of the Library's five departments only three have Curatorial Assistant posts to which staff are circulated on a bi-annual rotation. The division between the departments is unequal which makes it difficult to provide a balanced distribution. It is also impossible to provide a concrete circulation programme because the turn-over of leavers and starters precludes such planning.

3.4 **Tutoring** – The Library supports work towards the Associateship of the Library Association which is tutored by a senior member of staff.

3.5 **NAL Training Programme**

The Training officer is responsible for organizing an internal training programme. This takes place on Monday mornings and ranges widely:

3.5.1 Every six weeks a Public Services training session is held conducted by the Information Services Manager. Compulsory for all members of staff who contribute to running the reading rooms, this is an opportunity to inform on changes in operational procedures, to receive feedback and suggestions on procedural matters. It is a major tool in maintaining service standards.

3.5.2 Other available Mondays will have training sessions conducted by the staff responsible for the following: Copyright; The Web and html editing; Cataloguing Surgery (where catalogue developments and problems can be communicated); Conservation; Health & Safety; Book art; Manuscripts & illumination; Bindings; Typography; Analytical/Historical Bibliography; Book History; &c.

3.5.3 Group visits to other libraries are arranged.

3.5.4 External speakers are invited (funds permitting); e.g. the last was given by a lecturer in fashion design who had been a Royal College of Art/V&A student and had used the Library intensively. Apart from the subject, we were privileged to learn a good deal about our appeal, respectively the terrors, experienced by students wanting to use our services.

3.6 External - All staff are encouraged to develop professional expertise and subject knowledge by attending courses of study, conferences, seminars, away-days, skills training, &c.. A wide variety of subjects are considered: management; curatorial skills; conservation; professional skills such as cataloguing, information provision, &c.. Substantial assistance is given to those undertaking higher degrees in subjects of relevance to their work or to the work of the Library.

4. **Allocation** - Training is targeted by means of the annual staff appraisal. This includes a Professional Development Plan which is agreed with the line-manager and sets out areas of development that should be pursued. A two-way process is involved: staff make suggestions and

managers make suggestions. Both the Museum's Training Section and the Library's Training Officer use these to ensure that training applied for or offered is appropriate. A competencies project has been started which will document all the skills needed to do a job. This will mean increased targeting of training from the moment a member of staff is appointed. External events that have to be paid for necessarily and increasingly form a small part of the total. More IT skills are needed and the courses rapidly increase in cost.

4.1 Application is made on a form and agreed to if the course or event is of an adequate professional standard; if the line manager agrees and it is reflected in the Professional Development Plan..

5**. Budget -** The budget given for external courses this year is £7,500. This is the same as last year (when it was given in two six month tranches which made budgeting especially difficult). The year before the budget was £10,000. We request is excess of £30,000 and it is impossible to adequately provide for 60-70 staff from a budget of this size.

6. **Question** – What training programmes do your libraries offer and what should we be aiming to provide?