



The Gulf



Museum Skills Gap Analysis

Contents

About the report	01
Aims & methodology	02
Key findings	03
Results of the survey	11
Roundtable discussions	13
Challenges & opportunities in the sector	17
Conclusions	17
Recommendations	18

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Examining the cultural skills gaps in the Gulf: A growing cultural “ecosystem”

About the report

This report is the outcome of a research project undertaken by the British Council in partnership with University College London (UCL) in June-September 2020 that aimed to identify opportunities and needs in the museums and galleries sector, from the perspective of the practitioners in the Gulf States. The data collected will help the British Council to develop a range of capacity building opportunities in the future to support the sector in this part of the world.

The research was undertaken in two phases. In the first phase, we have collected quantitative data through an online survey that was shared with museum/gallery professionals in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The next phase, consisted of a series of roundtable discussions with key stakeholders in each country around topics that emerged from the surveys, and had as a primary aim to validate the information from the survey and collect qualitative data which would complement the quantitative ones.

It is important to note that the research was subject to limitations that have to do with the specific circumstances of the period it was conducted in (i.e. during the pandemic and therefore in different stages of lockdown in different countries), as well as the overall political situation in the region (the diplomatic relationships of the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and Qatar, on the other, are interrupted). Therefore, this study is not a fully comprehensive mapping of the cultural sector in each of the countries; it aims to provide an informative insight into the cultural sector in the region, which needs to be further enhanced and detailed for each of the countries in future research.

Acknowledgements

The British Council and UCL are extremely grateful to all professionals that dedicated time and energy to participate in the survey and to the roundtable (focus-group) discussions. Your contributions made this report possible.

Aims / Objectives and Methodology



The report surveyed 61 museum and gallery professionals from across Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

After initial discussions among the team members, desk-top research was undertaken in order to identify emerging themes in relation to cultural skills in the region. As a result, a research questionnaire was developed and shared with team members; it was further discussed and finalized taking into account previous experience from other similar research projects in the Gulf or other parts of the world. Field research then commenced – the survey was shared with different stakeholders

who were then asked to share it further with their colleagues. It was available for a short period of time (approximately two weeks) - with 61 participants responding to the survey, with all data collected anonymously. After the preliminary analysis of this data, five questions/themes of research were developed which became the themes around which roundtable discussions (focus groups) were conducted with museum directors and/or professionals in each of the countries.

Key Findings

Results of the survey

Who were the respondents?

The people who responded to the questionnaire reflect the multi-national/multi-cultural population in the Gulf States and the wide diversity this entails. Figure 1 (below) presents the diversity in terms of the nationality of the respondent.

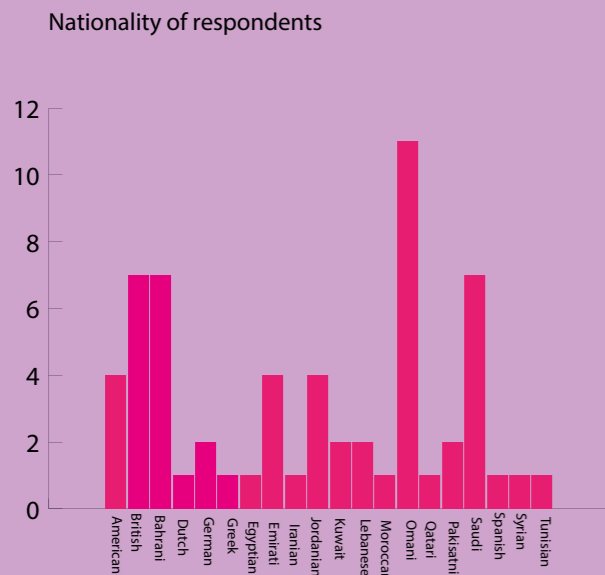


Fig 1

75.4% of the respondents were women, 77.8% in the age groups 26-45.

The majority of the respondents live in UAE (16), with Saudi (14), Oman (12), Qatar (8), Bahrain (8) and Kuwait (3) following. Unfortunately, the number of responses per country is very small and does not allow for specific country-by-country analysis.

Five of the respondents identify as disabled persons (8.20%).

The participants represent a wide variety of institutions, from private galleries to major museums, such as Louvre Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and the National Museum of Qatar. There are also academics (2) and individuals holding positions in government institutions. Most of the participants hold senior positions – which is interesting as it would be expected to have more junior

professionals keen to respond to the survey. On the other hand, the participation of more senior professionals means that they have a wide variety of experiences related both to their own careers and to their expectations when hiring people for different positions in their institutions. Figure 2 presents the professional roles the participants to the survey hold, as these were categorized after the analysis of the titles/positions offered by the respondents.

The majority of the participants hold first



Fig 2

degrees (BA) (63.9%); 47.5% hold a Master degree as well, whereas 9.84% (that corresponds to 6 individuals) hold a PhD. A similar percentage mentions other, unspecified, qualifications.

More than half of the participants (64%) responded that they did have gallery/museum training in the past. When asked for more specific information about their training, they mentioned a range of cases: from personal study and on the job training, to training for short periods of

time in various well-known international institutions, such as the Smithsonian (USA), the Louvre (France), and the Tate (UK). 14 participants (22.95%) mentioned that they have MA degrees in Museum and/or Gallery Studies.

The respondents to the survey mentioned other training experiences they had in the past, and these are presented in Figure 3 below.

In terms of experience, the majority of the respondents confirmed that they have been working for heritage organisations between 7 and 10 years, which means that they are mid-career professionals; the second largest group is the one with over 15 years of experience, which means fully mature professionals. This resonates with the senior positions most of the respondents hold.

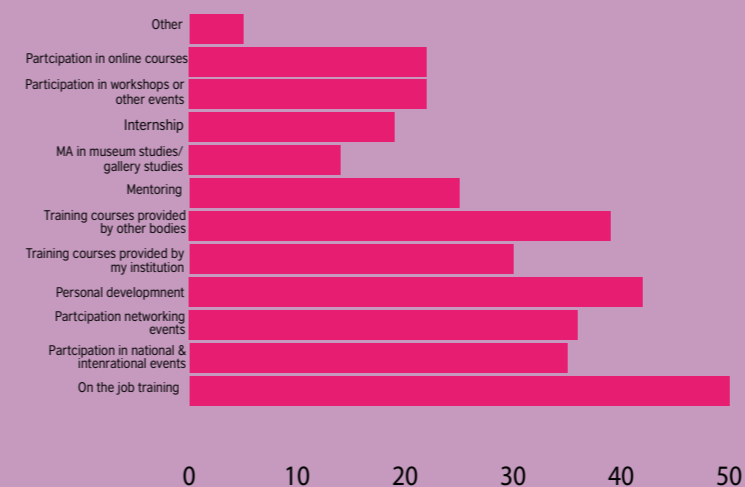


Fig 3

What are their views on the current situation in museum/gallery professionalism education in the Gulf?

Question no. 12 of the survey aimed to focus on the participants' opinion regarding the current provision of educational support in the cultural sector in their countries and, therefore, to map the field. 41 participants (67.21%) responded that there are some organisations providing educational resources, while 13 participants (21.31%) felt that there are none. Only 7 participants (11.48%) responded that

Perceptions about training provisions per country

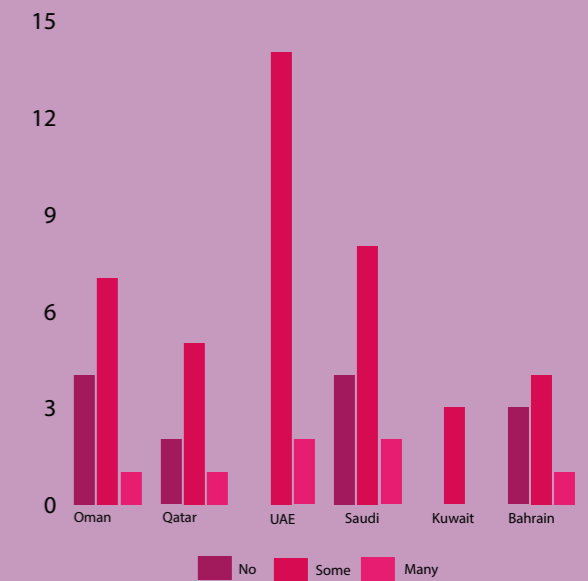


Fig 4

there are many organisations in the country they live and work in that offer training in this area. It is interesting to relate the responses of the participants with their country of living.

It seems that perceptions and knowledge about training opportunities ranges substantially, as the responses are very different even among people who live in the same country. This is important, as it shows that it is not enough to have institutions offering training, but it is equally, or even more important for this knowledge to be shared and widely known, so that professionals can take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Question 13 aimed to get the views of the participants regarding whether the professional field in their respective country has enough skilled or experienced professionals. The majority of respondents (73.77%) believe that there are professionals who fit this description, but there are not enough. Only 4 individuals (6.56%) responded that there are enough experienced professionals in their country of work.



Museum and Gallery Skills Analysis Fig 5

Answer choices	Responses	
Communication	27.8%	17
Marketing & PR skills	44.26%	27
Audience development	70.49%	43
Interpretation	36.07%	22
Education & outreach	60.66%	37
Accessability	32.79%	20
Curatorial Skills	67.21%	41
Exhibition design	54.10%	33
New media skills/ digital skills	37.7%	23
Collections management skills	49.18%	30
Project management skills	29.51%	18
Fundraising	54.10%	33
Front of house/ visitor service skills	21.31%	13
Art handling	47.54%	29
Conservation	59.02%	36
International exposure to best practice	49.18%	30
Leadership skills	26.63%	16
Formal qualification in museum and gallery studies	70.49%	43
Skills that relate to creativity	34.34%	21
Risk management/ management in crisis	44.26%	27
Volunteer/Intern management	34.43%	21
Other (please specify)	3.28%	2

When asked about the areas with the most important skill gaps, the responses mentioned

- Audience development (70.5%),
 - Curatorial skills (67.21 %),
 - Education and outreach (60.66%),
 - Conservation (59.02%),
 - Exhibition design (54.10%),
 - Fundraising (54.10%),
 - Collections management skills (49.18%), and
 - International Exposure to best practices (49.18%),
- as the most important areas. All areas and

responses are available in Figure 5 (right).

In terms of the relation between theory and practice, i.e. whether university graduates have enough knowledge to actually work in the cultural sector (museums/galleries/cultural heritage) once they graduate from the university, respondents provided some interesting insights: they consider that graduates are usually underqualified for the academic roles in the institutions (50.82%), they are even more underqualified for technical positions (59.02%), but they do have the appropriate level of knowledge when it comes to business support roles (65.57%), including administrative support and visitor services. (Figure 6).

	They are usually overqualified for the role	They have the appropriate level of qualification for the role	They are usually underqualified for the role	Total	Weighting
Academic roles (such as curatorship, leadership)	1.64% (1)	47.5% (29)	50.82% (31)	61	2.49
Technical roles (such as art handling etc)	1.64% (1)	39.34% (24)	59.02% (36)	61	2.57
Business support roles (admin, visitor services etc)	1.64% (1)	65.57% (40)	32.79% (20)	61	2.31

Fig 6

This is a particularly thought-provoking finding that can be used both for the design of University curriculum in all countries, as well as for identifying key gaps in the heritage sector workforce.

The next question aimed to focus on how difficult, or not, it is to find qualified people to hire for different positions in the museum and heritage sector. This question was particularly relevant to respondents, since, as mentioned before, they hold leading roles in the cultural heritage sector and, therefore, they are actively involved in hiring new professionals.

According to responses, the most difficult positions to cover are:

- General museum/gallery management (63.93%)
- Conservation (63.93%)
- Collections and exhibition management (59.02%)
- Archiving (55.74%)
- Audience development (52.46 %)

Followed by:

- Exhibition design (45.9%)
- Curation (44.26%)
- Evaluation (44.26%)
- Policy writing (42.62%)
- Crisis management (40.98%)
- Storytelling and interpretation (39.34%)

On the other hand, it seems that business related skills are easy to find. The respondents rate different areas/positions in terms of how easy it is to find people for these roles as follows:

- Marketing (49.18% of respondents think that it is easy to cover positions in this field)
- Business skills (44.26% of respondents think that it is easy to cover positions in this field)
- Tourism (42.62% of respondents think that it is easy to cover positions in this field)
- Finance (40.98% of respondents think that it is easy to cover positions in this field)
- Sales (32.79% of respondents think that it is easy to cover positions in this field)

Nearly 64% of respondents felt that management was the most difficult position to fill



Gallery museum/gallery management	2.56
Restoration/ conservation	2.51
Archiving	2.49
Audience development	2.44
Collection and exhibition management	2.44
Exhibition design	2.36
Policy	2.33
Curating	2.33
Evaluation	2.30
Crisis management	2.26
Storytelling/interpretation	2.25
International exposure	2.11
Creativity	2.08
Time management	2.05
Management and leadership	1.98
Education	1.98
Volunteer management	1.97
Project management	1.90
English language	1.90
Sales and online Sales	1.87
Entrepreneurship	1.85
Digital technologies	1.85
Communication	1.80
Teamwork	1.79
Finance	1.77
Tourism	1.72
Business Skills	1.69
Marketing	1.67

The table (above) presents all the options the participants were given in the question regarding how easy it is to fill these positions with qualified people and their responses starting from the most difficult positions to cover to the easiest ones.



What are the skills required for the future?

The next series of questions aimed to discuss the perceptions regarding individual and general training needs for the future. In order to organize the responses in a more systematic manner, we categorized the skills in three broad areas: museum/arts management; digital technologies and new media; and cultural entrepreneurship – taking into account what international research suggests regarding the needs of heritage professionals (see Davis, 2011; ISE 2018; Silvaggi and Pesce 2018).

In terms of the museum/arts management, the participants to the research identified:

- International and Cross-Cultural Museum/Arts Management (70.49%),
- Audience Development (68.85%), and
- Fundraising (60.66%)

as the most important skills that they would personally like to improve.

The full list is presented in Figure 8

Answer choices	Responses
Project management	24
Financial museum/ arts management	31
Fundraising	37
Marketing	20
Audience development	42
Presentation & communication skills	22
International & cross-cultural arts management	43
Intellectual rights management	35
Collection management	31
Leadership & team support	17
Other	6

Fig 8

The choice of skills reflects the professional profile of the participants (as they are in leading positions in their organizations), but also the multicultural environment of the Gulf, that requires special skills regarding inter-cultural communication. Furthermore, developing the audience for institutions is an important requirement internationally, as it connects with the sustainability of institutions. Fundraising has become very important in the last few years for countries in the Gulf, due to the need to transition from oil and natural resources economies to other economic models.

The following question aimed to move from the personal to the general level, and asked for a prioritization of the most important skills in the same category – not on an individual basis, this time, but according to their professional understanding. The prioritization gave similar but not exactly the same results (see Figure 9), as it seems that Collections Management and Project Management take priority over Fundraising, when it comes to the required skills from cultural heritage/arts/museum workforce. However, International and Cross-cultural Management and Audience Development remain at the top of the list.

In the group of skills categorized under Digital Technologies and New Media that the participants to this research are personally interested in, priorities lie with Understanding the Right Technology for the Right Use (52.46%), i.e. a soft skill that is most appropriate for people making decisions around the use of different media, followed by Collections Management Databases (49.18%) and Virtual and Augmented Reality tools (47.54%). The importance of collection databases and management systems is appreciated by all heritage and arts professionals, as the resources available to institutions multiply fast, whereas VR and AR tools are emerging technologies whose use in heritage institutions increases every day. Interestingly, all skills in this category have very high percentages, indicating the increased importance of digital skills for museum professionals (Figure 10).

Answer Choices	Responses
Project management	36.07% 22
Fundraising	31.15% 19
Marketing	24.59 % 15
Audience development	49.15% 30
Presentation & communication skills	29.51% 18
International & cross-cultural museum/ arts management	50.82% 31
Intellectual rights management	22.95% 14
Collections management	32.79% 20
Leadeship & team support	16.39% 10
Other	6.56% 4

Fig 9

Answer Choices	Responses
Understanding which is the right technology for each purpose	55.46% 32
Digital arts & design	44.26% 27
Social media marketing & communications	39.34% 24
Digital marketing	39.34% 24
New media for arts management	42.62% 26
Crowd sourcing/ online platforms for funding	32.79% 20
Website design/ webiste technologies	27.87% 17
Virtual reality/augmented reality tools	47.54% 29
Data managment	18.03% 11
Collections management database	49.18% 30
Digital copyright management	39.34% 24
Other	29.51% 18
Issues of online privacy & security	3.28% 2

Fig 10

The next question focused on another category of skills, i.e. those that fall under cultural entrepreneurship (Figure 11).

Finance and Economics (Fundraising included) (52.46%), Strategy, Design and Innovation (49.18%) and New Entrepreneurial models (49.18%) seem to be the most popular responses in this question, followed by Negotiation (44.26%), Ethics and Sustainability (42.62%) and Intercultural Skills and Networking (40.98%).

In order to suggest possible formats of training, the participants were asked to choose among different categories and types. The majority of the respondents (81.97%) believe that on the job training is

very important. Workshops or other events organized by ICOM or another international professional body seems to be the second best choice (73.77%), with training courses provided by other bodies (62.30%) being the third alternative. (Figure 12). This emphasis on informal or on-the-job training is also reflected (and fleshed out more) in the discussions undertaken (see below). Participation in online courses is very low in terms of priority (the lowest percentage of 26.23%), something which probably reflects the fact that most of the countries in the region do not officially recognize qualifications gained online (for determining the salary or position in the organization).

Answer Choices	Responses
Creativity	32.79% 20
Strategy, design & innovation	49.18% 30
New entrepreneurial models	49.18% 30
Crisis management	50.82% 31
Negotiation	44.26% 27
Leadership skills	34.43% 21
Ethics & susainability	42.62% 26
History of art	36.07% 22
Learning by doing	19.67% 12
Equality & diversity	22.95% 14
Intercultural skills & networking	40.98% 25
Skills of finance & economics (fundraising included)	52.46% 32
Skills & knowledge of entrepreneurship	31.15% 19
Other (please specify)	0.00% 0

Fig 11

Answer choices	Responses
On the job training	81.97% 50
Participation in national & international conferences	47.54% 29
Participation in networking events	44.26% 27
Personal development (e.g. readiing, taking part in webinars & talks)	42.62% 26
Training courses provided by my institution	34.43% 21
Training courses provided by other bodies	62.30% 38
Mentoring	44.26% 27
MA in museum studies/ gallery studies	42.62% 26
Internship	45.90% 28
Participation in workshops or other events organised by ICOM or another international professional body	73.77% 45
Participation in online courses	26.23% 16
Other	0.00% 0

Fig 12

General Remarks

Participants to the survey were asked to offer their thoughts on the sector and the skills required to work in museum/galleries and heritage organizations in the Gulf. A thought-provoking series of suggestions was made. The responses can be organized into three main areas: relations between heritage institutions and education (professional and more general education); research; and social/structural issues that need attention.

When it comes to the relationship between education and heritage institutions, participants to the research feel that there is a need to better connect all levels of education in the Gulf countries with museums and galleries. For instance, one of the participants argues: “The education system places low emphasis on the arts, let alone studies related to galleries or museums. There is also very little support from the local government towards the art sector, and most initiatives are fueled via private benefactors and organisations.” Or, in another participants’ words: “the knowledge on how to establish, prepare, fund raise, and manage permanent, non-profit public spaces for events and exhibitions, other than private galleries and museums [is required]. The Gulf area does not have these facilities on government and corporate level. In my opinion, it is essential and basic for public education on art and culture.”

“ The education system places low emphasis on the arts, let alone studies related to galleries or museums.

Some responses highlight the lack of communication between university programmes available in their respective countries and the needs of professional organisations. For instance, a participant claimed: “Although some MA degrees were offered in the Gulf, graduates have an extreme lack of practical experience. I found that the level of graduates is uneven, and also that grades are not always a right indication of personal capacity, which makes it hard to determine candidate’s level when hiring.” Or according to another participant: “I feel that there is still a gap or misunderstanding between what is needed in museums and arts institutions and what is being taught in schools and universities, in order for us [to] be able to efficiently hire, source and train staff (locally); universities need to be teaching more specialised courses, i.e curating, exhibition design, collections mgt, etc.”. Another one of the respondents makes a similar comment from another

“ We need to develop the skills of museum workers in selection, guidance, and conservation. And the development of communication skills and communication with the public

perspective: “Having developed several arts management courses here in the UAE over the last 10 years, I believe that one needs to advocate the importance of arts management before offering courses in it. Few graduates and creative professionals are interested and understand the need to possess strong administrative skills. Thus, those entering administrative roles in arts organizations lack the necessary competencies although they possess a strong interest in the arts specialism.” In this case, the same emphasis is placed on general education about the arts, and a better connection with society, but in addition the participant argues that it is important to persuade people on the need for specialized education as well. This reflects a way of thinking which appears in other parts of the world too, i.e. one that believes that interest (or knowledge) in the arts alone is enough to make someone an arts/heritage professional – which is not exactly true.

It becomes obvious that more collaboration is needed even in the countries where there are formal educational programmes on museum and gallery studies, so that the actual needs of the organisations are met. This should be taken into account in the cases that new programmes are created, as one of the participants advocates for: “MA and PhD studies programmes in KSA [are required]”. Another participant claims: “We need a specialized department to study museums in Gulf universities, especially in the Sultanate [of Oman]”.

The importance of research is highlighted by some participants as well; some refer to formal research-based training, others in research in the field of museums and heritage: “The sector needs scientific research in the museums sector, as the current balance of research is very little ...” claims one participant, whereas another one asks for “A scientific forum”.

Some of the respondents connect their interest in research with their views regarding specific gaps in professional training that need to be covered: for instance, “We need to develop the skills of museum workers in selection, guidance, and conservation. And the development of communication skills and

“ To work in this sector in the Gulf, it is important to give equal opportunities irrelevant of ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Remove those who act as gate keepers..



communication with the public”, argues one participant. Another one claims: “Research about Art movements in Gulf countries on style, techniques, subjects [is required]”. A third one mentions different areas that deserve further training and research: “There is a lack of training in remedial and preventive conservation in all areas of museum, site management and gallery work. There is also a lack of collection management training. Lack of understanding about how Conservation and Collections Management operate together.” Finally, one participant expresses the view that: “There has been growth in curatorial skills, however, a combination of practical project management skills would be beneficial”. Communication (in person and online) is another area mentioned in the research: “Increase training workshops associated with museum guidance, interest in underdeveloped websites”, is according to another participant what is needed. Similarly, communication with

the public and raising awareness is considered very important: “Increasing public awareness of the culture and museums sector to increase their visits to these cultural facilities” is what is required, according to one of the respondents.

Finally, a few comments refer to social or structural issues that need attention in the arts/heritage sector in the Gulf. One participant mentions: “To work in this sector in the Gulf, it is important to give equal opportunities irrelevant of ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Remove those who act as gate keepers.” Another one asks: “Hiring the right person in the right place”. The same kind of frustration is expressed in the comments: “There needs to be a recognised career path from entry level positions. It is important to build up experience and knowledge. Within the Gulf, there are a lot of consultants and contractors – [a fact] which does impact development. Need to encourage pan-Gulf networking and collaboration.”



Rountable Discussions (focus groups) : Key Findings

A series of roundtable discussions (focus groups) were conducted online in July-August 2020.

The table underneath presents the participants and the dates of each event. The duration of each discussion ranged between one and two hours. In some cases, the participants were so involved that the discussion overran the allocated time. All discussions were conducted online, using the platform Microsoft Teams and were organized by the local branches of the British Council.

Before all meetings a similar agenda had been shared with all participants. The agenda highlighted the main

areas of discussion that are also the categories used below to present and discuss the data collected.

- Who are the heritage professionals in the country? (their profiles, comparative approaches with other parts of the world / other experiences / comparison with other fields)
- The relationship between academic institutions/ academic training and professionals
- Forms of training, previous experience of training and importance of different categories of training
- Skills: importance, prioritisation
- Challenges and Opportunities for the sector in the country

Date	Country	Participants
29/7/2020	Qatar	5 participants (Private Museum / QF / Art Gallery)
19/8/2020	KSA	7 participants (National Museum/ Royal Commission for Alula / Diriyah Gate Authority / Athr Gallery / Naila Gallery/ Art Jameel / Madina Development Authority)
24/8/2020	Bahrain	5 participants (Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities / Al Riwaq Art Space/ Folk Art Space)
25/8/2020	Oman	8 participants (Aliya Gallery / National Museum / Bait Al Zubair museum / Bait Branda / people Museum (Ghaliya Museum of Modern art) / Natural History Museum of Oman)
30/08/2020	Kuwait	6 participants (Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) / Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) / National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) / Tareq Rajab Museum / Al Shaheed Park Museums / Kuwait Cultural Centres (KCC)
31/08/2020	UAE	9 participants (Louvre Abu Dhabi /Culture Counsel / Alserkal Avenue/Jameel Arts Centre / Tashkeel / Guggenheim Museum Abu Dhabi / Sheikhha Salama bint Hamdan Foundation - Warehouse421 / Department of Culture and Tourism/ Sharjah Art Foundation / Maraya Art Centre)

Current Situation: profiles of professionals in the museum and art sectors in the country

The profile of arts and cultural heritage professionals in all countries seems very similar to the profile that the surveys revealed: it is a very international group, whose skills and expertise range quite a lot. This diversity in the workforce is considered a positive characteristic by the participants (e.g. Qatar).

In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman participants referred to a generation gap as well: there seem to be two groups of professionals employed in the field: the older generation who have been trained in more traditional disciplines, like archaeology, and they hold senior positions in institutions, and a younger generation, who is trained in more interdisciplinary areas, like museum studies, but they do not always have access to positions that would allow them to make a change. These young professionals are usually trained abroad (USA, UK, Australia, but also Korea or Japan), and they recognise the importance of learning more about museology and heritage in the region – as opposed to generic ideas that are applicable to other parts of the world. A similar view was expressed by participants from Qatar, who highlighted the importance of studying about cultural heritage, arts and museums in the Gulf with an emphasis and focus on practices and theoretical perspectives that are more relevant regionally. These young professionals seem to come with a lot of enthusiasm that often makes up for the lack of experience.

The participants felt that there are two categories of capacity building needed for existing professionals, who have a lot of experience, but not formal training, there is the need for training in new skills taking into account recent developments in their areas of work. On the other hand, young professionals who have studied museums or arts on an academic level, need training in order to acquire more practical skills and experience (see UAE). The phrase “help young talent grow” was used by many participants from most countries to talk about the support they want to offer to young professionals in their country.

The professional field has attracted and continues to attract many women – they were the majority of participants in the focus groups as well. The stereotypes regarding women in the Arab world were also mentioned (Oman), to highlight the fact that women are driving forces in terms of arts, culture and heritage in the region and their involvement in the sector is extensive and very important (see also Qatar).

Regarding the attraction of the sector for younger generations, especially of local people, in all discussions it was mentioned that this is a new field, not very familiar to local audiences and therefore working in the arts/cultural heritage sector is not always considered an appropriate career. Lack of early

Women are driving forces in terms of arts, culture and heritage in the region and their involvement in the sector is extensive and very important



exposure to museums and heritage attractions or the arts, leads to a lack of interest from locals to invest in studies and work in heritage organisations. For this reason, it was mentioned in almost all discussions that a relationship with schools is considered important and is often a priority for government organisations or private initiatives (see Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain).

Participants highlighted the growing “ecosystem” of heritage in their countries. In all countries, participants seem to agree that the cultural heritage, arts and museum sector has been growing the last few years, often as a result of efforts that have been made in the recent past. In some countries, the emphasis has been related to the establishment or operation of new museums (see Qatar, UAE, Oman). In other cases, the participants made a point about investing in people and their involvement in the arts/heritage instead of building new museums (see Saudi Arabia) – although they do that, too. Other participants highlighted the policy developments in their country (see Oman) that will lead change, along with many new private initiatives in this area. Regardless of how each country justifies the “growing ecosystem”, they all agree that this is the current reality in their country.

However, finding well trained and experienced professionals is still not an easy task in most cases. It is easier to find consultants for specific projects, but not always easy to find people willing to move to the countries and invest in their presence there. It is still not easy to find well trained local people to be involved in the sector. In some cases, the financial limitations concerning bringing in the country well-known curators or big artistic projects was also mentioned (Bahrain, Oman) as a restriction that hinders the quality of work, but also the attractiveness of the field.

Another limitation mentioned has to do with the lack of programmes and resources in Arabic. The limited number of Arab speaking high profile professionals to serve as role models and mentors was also mentioned by participants in the focus groups (see Qatar).

Relationship between academic institutions/academic training and professionals

In all discussions a relationship with local universities, schools and other training bodies was mentioned. In all cases there seems to be awareness of the need to create strong relationships with all levels of education. This corroborates the results of the survey, where the relationship between arts and heritage institutions on the one hand and educational institutions on the other has been highlighted.

However, in almost all cases there are not cultural heritage focused programmes in local Universities (with the exception of Abu Dhabi where there is a good relationship with the branch of NYU and Qatar where there was a branch of UCL until September 2020). However, the cultural sector seems to have a good relationship with other University departments, especially those teaching arts, and to facilitate internships of students. In some cases (e.g. Kuwait) local Universities do not offer enough in terms of curricula on the humanities (e.g. they do not offer even traditional topics, like archaeology). The need for increased collaboration with Universities for the

development of relevant programmes (curricula for vocational training, as well as specialised topics, like museum studies, heritage studies or arts management) was mentioned by almost all participants and seems to be a priority for almost all countries.

However, there seems to be a growing emphasis on liaising with schools in order to introduce students and families into arts from an early stage. This is considered as a step that aims, first, to engage people more with the arts and heritage institutions (audience development), and then, to encourage local people to get to know and work for the sector.

The need for more programmes in academic institutions was mentioned in almost all cases, in relation also to the lack of resources and the need to focus on the region and its special characteristics. Participants implicitly or explicitly mentioned the importance of developing a 'museology of the Gulf', i.e. museology that takes into account cultural issues, as well as the fact that museums in western countries had the time to go through different phases; however, museums in the Gulf have to move very quickly through different stages, without necessarily having the time to adapt and change as an internal process (see Qatar and Oman).

Skills: importance, prioritisation

The discussion about the skills required provided very similar results to the ones by the survey: technical skills seem to be a top priority. Conservation, Restoration (of buildings), and Collections Management (with all the related areas, such as object registration and documentation, databases, art handling) were mentioned as key skills required by all participants.

There is a similar agreement on soft and transferrable skills, critical and creative thinking, writing (texts), research and writing of research papers, digital confidence, communication and understanding (of audiences), are among the most commonly referred to ones.

In terms of professional skills, in almost all cases curatorship or skills related to it were mentioned: research in archaeology, art history, even in natural history (taxonomy), as well as knowledge about how to organise and present collections.

The next group of skills refers to management: management of art spaces, management of volunteers and interns, project management were repeatedly discussed as very important by participants.

The next group of skills was the one related to practical work in a cultural heritage/arts institution: how to create exhibits; how to plan educational activities; how to take people around the museum (tour guides); how to build temporary exhibitions.

Finally, more general skills were mentioned, such as: general museological training, library skills, arts management.

In terms of the categories used for organising the skills in



the survey, the facilitator tried to engage the participants into a discussion around digital skills and entrepreneurial skills. Participants agreed that these are important and referred to their need for both. In terms of digital skills, there was a clear reference to COVID-19 and the increased needs for digital resources, so participants referred to the skills required for communication purposes (e.g. designing online exhibits) (Bahrain). However, we should notice that these skills were not among those mentioned without the facilitator's prompting.

Similar was the approach to entrepreneurial skills: although they were acknowledged as important, when participants were asked about them, they were not among the ones mentioned as a priority. Especially in the case of fundraising, there seem to be local considerations that need to be taken into account, such as legal limitations in some countries (e.g. Bahrain).



Forms of training, previous experience of training and importance of different categories of training

Training for local people is considered a priority in most countries (see KSA, Bahrain). This training needs to be accredited (UAE and KSA emphasised that), as accredited training is recognised as a formal qualification for professional development. In the case of KSA, cultural organisations related to local authorities or big projects mentioned that capacity building for local people is considered part of their mandate.

Almost all participants referred to training programmes that have been organised in their country, or in their institutions, in collaboration with major museums in countries such as the USA and the UK. A wide range of collaborations were presented; with Smithsonian Institution (Bahrain); the British Museum (KSA); Kew Gardens and the Natural History Museum in London and New York (Oman); the Louvre (KSA; UAE), etc. In addition, programmes organised by UNDP, UNICEF and other international organisations were mentioned in one case (Kuwait).

Participants highlighted the importance of long-term training. They believe in the value of programmes that are delivered by other professionals with experience in the region, and an understanding of practical museum work. The common approach seems to be on shared knowledge, peer-to-peer learning, job-shadowing, mentoring, communities of practice and knowledge transfer opportunities, as

opposed to traditional capacity building training courses.

These programmes need to be bespoke, preferably in collaboration with other institutions that will offer their expertise and best practices. Despite the fact that there is an interest in collaboration with these institutions, participants were also concerned about "western norms" that would not "fit their needs" (UAE). In some cases, partnerships are undertaken with institutions in other, non-Western, countries, as for instance the Bombay Centre for Critical Analysis that has a collaboration with institutions in UAE.

This is in line with the results from the survey, where a similar emphasis was placed on on-the-job training and alternative forms of capacity buildings as opposed to the more traditional ones.

One small difference compared to the outcomes of the survey was the fact that the participants did not mention at all – or mentioned in a non-positive way (UAE) – the role of international bodies, like ICOM. In the survey, responses seemed to favour training provided by such international organisations. However, this is possibly related to the need for accreditation and not to the trust to the specific organisations.

In a couple of cases, there was reference to the work undertaken by the Museums Association in the UK and in particular in the Fellowships and Associateships programmes that they offer. These are formal (and therefore accredited) professional development awards available through an internationally acknowledged professional body and, therefore, well-respected and sought after.

Challenges and Opportunities for the sector

In terms of the challenges and opportunities for the sector there were similarities but also differences among the different countries. Although, there seems to be an increased interest in the sector throughout the Gulf, the priorities in each case seem to be quite different.

In the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the sector is rising and there are demands not just for university courses and capacity building at different levels, but also for resources – libraries, bibliography, all possible resources that can be used to deliver what seemed to be the focus of the discussion: “planning for audiences instead of simply establishing museums”.

In the case of Qatar, the new museums have given a boost to the sector. Despite the fact that there are practical needs (such as conservation), the participants felt that the situation in the country is at a stage where there is the “need to create a local ecosystem that will not mimic that of the West”. This connects well with the request for more resources and role models from the Arab speaking world.

In the case of Sultanate of Oman, the increased emphasis on the sector is highlighted by the recent establishment of a Ministry for cultural heritage. The country seems to have a longer connection to heritage issues than some of the other countries with many private initiatives and individuals who are invested in creating arts/museums and cultural heritage attractions. However, the participants highlighted the need for a national policy about heritage (which they hoped will be achieved through the new Ministry), but also the need for other forms of policy, for instance museum policies. The participants raised the issue of the number of institutions that the country can support and there was a lively discussion about on the one hand the role museums can

play in local development and tourism, and on the other the need to maintain high standards of professionalism and services by smaller, private initiatives. Some participants even suggested the need for a museum registration system.

In the case of Bahrain, lack of resources seems to be a challenge for both public and private institutions. The latter suffer more from this, as the legal framework regarding fundraising is also quite restrictive. More active collaboration between the public and the private sector could also be a suggestion, as there seems to be space for improvement in communication between the two. Despite the small size of the country, huge potential seems to exist that needs to be further supported.

In the case of Kuwait, a new legal framework when implemented will support both cultural heritage institutions and the creative sector. A new heritage sector strategy seems to be required, and the professionals of both the public and the private domain need to make their voice heard at a higher level, something that needs co-ordination and collaboration. Currently there seems to be a disconnect between the public and the private sector (as in Bahrain and Oman). However, there was a lot of enthusiasm and the will to create a platform that will discuss the needs, shape expectations and develop a more uniform approach to all cultural and creative matters.

In the case of the UAE, it seems that each of the Emirates is in a different situation regarding the arts and museums/cultural heritage. In Abu Dhabi and Sharjah the cultural sector seems to be rich and well organised; less so in Dubai and even less in the other Emirates. The plans for the future include supporting “young talent” and work further on establishing connections among professionals, and between the cultural sector and tourism. The community is eager for accredited training and ready for the establishment of a cultural professional network.

General remarks

In almost all cases, participants to the focus groups’ discussions took the opportunity to talk with their peers and reflect on the professional field of cultural heritage, arts and museums in their country. It was obvious that there were many similarities in the needs of the countries, but also many differences that relate to the specific circumstances of each country, as well as its history and museum/heritage traditions.

All participants seemed to appreciate the opportunity offered by the British Council to meet and discuss about their sector. In almost all cases, providing opportunities for networking, organising events, and bringing professionals together with their peers in the UK, and the other countries of the GCC, but also within the country were the main suggestions for the future made.



Conclusions

The survey and the focus groups discussions provided very useful data that can help towards a more targeted provision of training in the Gulf States. The profile of the participants is comparable to that of the museum and heritage sectors in other regions, i.e. mostly female professionals (although many male participants hold senior positions), in a mid or mature career stage, with a good educational background, a good understanding and knowledge of their field and interest in future development. However, unlike other countries, the arts and heritage professionals that responded to our survey and participated in the discussions form a very multinational group, a fact which reflects the multi-cultural societies in the Gulf States in general. They come from many different parts of the world, they have very different training and often have experience of very different educational approaches.

The fields of museums/cultural heritage and the arts seem to have limited support from and connection to the formal education sector, as the provision of educational and vocational programmes in the region seems to be very limited. This is further reflected in the lack, or limited supply, of qualified individuals to work in this sector, and reflects in a way, the lack of awareness about this area of work from the people in the region. Participants highlight in many different ways the need for a stronger connection between education, heritage and arts institutions and the general public. This lack of communication between the professional sector and educational institutions is further reflected in the comments regarding the level of university graduates and the gaps in their knowledge when it comes to academic and technical areas of museum work. Therefore, apart from training programmes, it might be interesting to consider the establishment of internship programmes and/or volunteer programmes for school and university students in collaboration with heritage and arts institutions. However, these internship programmes should come with appropriate training for heritage professionals, as interns and/or volunteers tend to require special attention and a certain level of expertise in order for the collaboration to be successful for both parties involved in it.

The professionals involved in this research have all received extensive training in the past. This training was often developed in collaboration with major museums in other countries, such as the USA, the UK and France. However, it becomes obvious that this training was either not available to all, or had limited effect and limited duration, partly because there was no strategic planning behind it. On the job training, and connection of training with the focus of the organization is very important. The interest expressed in training provided in association with international professional bodies such as ICOM (International Council of Museums), or other reputable bodies (such as the Museums Association in the UK) relates both to the international profile of the workforce in the region (and therefore the need for training that is recognized internationally), and to the need for training that is accredited and practical. It is a need for peer-to-peer training, instead of university-based or classroom-



based training.

When it comes to the expertise needed in heritage/arts organisations, academic areas, such as curatorship, visitor studies, etc. and expertise in technical skills, like conservation, collections management, etc. seem to be the areas that suffer the most. On the other hand, the business and visitor service sides seem to be more fully covered in terms of experts. This is further reflected in the questions regarding the skills that professionals consider important, on a personal and a more general level. International and Cross-Cultural Management, Collections Management, Audience Development and Fundraising appear on the top of almost all relevant questions. Similar were the results of the discussions, although in this case, collections management skills seem to have more urgency.

The need for further research and investment in the arts and heritage sector in the region is reflected clearly in the responses of the participants and the discussions. There is a lot more work that needs to be done in order to better understand and support the museums and arts organizations of the region, and a lot more investment not just in buildings, but also in the people that will make them operate as professional heritage institutions.

Recommendations



- The British Council, but also policy makers and local stakeholders in each country need to acknowledge the growing cultural “ecosystem” and plan for supporting it.
- All capacity building programmes need to be developed and planned in consultation with/ collaboration with local institutions, be well advertised and communicated so that professionals know about them and can take advantage of them.
- It is important to collaborate with gatekeepers: they need to be persuaded about the importance and value of the offering before they share the information with other professionals. Hierarchies are very strong and the role of gatekeepers is very important (see Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar).
- Networking: the British Council can play a very important role in providing opportunities for networking. It can become a hub and provide opportunities (online or physical) for people to gather, discuss and exchange views and ideas.
- Facilitate interaction and collaboration with British institutions: these include not only museums, but also Universities and the Museums Association, as well as other professional bodies (for instance, CILIP for Libraries and Museums).
- Attention needs to be paid to retaining a balance between sharing expertise and best practices and being relevant to the region.
- Important to consider cultural and legal parameters as well.
- There is a need to support and invest in young people’s skills, as well as their awareness of the possibilities offered in this sector. Collaboration with schools, and higher education institutions locally, internships and volunteer programmes are very important, as well as support to the institutions in order to be able to develop such programmes. Support of “local young talent” is very important.
- In terms of capacity building the methodologies that professionals are mostly interested in are long-term collaborative projects, peer-to-peer learning, practical learning on the job. All courses need to be accredited by professional

organisations internationally acknowledged and respected.

- Content of capacity building training: collections management, inter-cultural management, learning and audience development are the areas of priority for all countries.
- When it comes to the specific categories professional skills can be organized, the prioritization per category is presented in the following table

Museums/ Arts Management	Digital Technologies & New media	Cultural Entrepreneurship
International/ Cross-cultural management	Digital Confidence	Finance/ Fundraising
Collections Management	Collections management systems/ databases	New entrepreneurial models
Audience Development	Augmented and Virtual Reality	Strategy/ innovation/design

To these categories, two more should be added, as per the table below:

Soft Skills	Research/ Curatorial Skills
Creative & Critical thinking	Curatorial research skills
Academic Writing Skills	

- There is a strong need for the development of resources in Arabic, as well as the promotion of Arab role models.
- On another level, the British Council could liaise / collaborate with policy makers in each country to support the development of arts/museum/cultural heritage policies, taking into consideration the National Vision of each country and the specific requirements of its economical and social framework.

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