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## Conclusions

1. Be clear about any restrictions on the work you may or may not do.
2. Know what you are letting yourself in for, and don't bite off more than you can chew.
3. Ensure you have adequate resources available to do the work.
4. If in doubt, CHECK!
5. If still in doubt, DON'T DO IT!

## SURFING THE BUDGET CUTS: THE RANGE OF CONSULTANCY WORK AT SHEFFIELD MUSEUM

Derek Whiteley, Sheffield Museum.

### Introduction

Some years ago, during my stint as BCG Secretary, the Committee initiated **BCG Watchdog**, a pro-active lobby to put pressure on museums to fill vacant posts, thaw out 'frozen' posts and even create new ones. We lobbied directors, committee chairs, local groups, embarrassed museums now and then, and threatened excommunication from the Beetle-down Campaign. We had a fair degree of success.

Nowadays the task is more difficult. Entire natural history services are being wiped out. Lincoln and the Passmore Edwards spring to mind. In 1993 Sheffield came perilously close to disappearing.

### Sheffield

The political goings-on between a strongly Socialist local authority and a strongly Conservative Central Government are well documented in the media. Ratecapping, pollcapping, community charge capping, redetermination bids and decreasing central support grants have become a way of life year in year out.

In 1991 the running costs of the World Student Games and subsequent capital repayments have put additional financial pressure on Sheffield City Council, particularly the Leisure Services Directorate which now includes the Arts and Museums Department.

Our sufferings over the past ten years can be summarised as follows:-

1985-1990	'Salami-slicing' off activity budgets
1991	Large deficit to make good
1992	Cuts. Income targets introduced
1993	Big cuts
1994	Cuts - Natural History budget goes into 'negative equity'
1995	More cuts.

As a 'cost centre manager' one is faced with a choice of options:-

Museum entrance charges	- politically unacceptable
Macerate all activity budgets	- all activity ceases
Whinge and moan and protest	- only goes so far
Lose staff as 'surplus to requirements'	- leads to staff insecurity, stress and demotivation
Make some money	- the only real alternative.

At this point I need to emphasise that income-generation does not necessarily mean total commercialisation. We still believe in a free museum, free bench space, free access to collections and a free service to the general public, science, scholars etc. We are simply acting as a modern Robin Hood,

taking money from commercial organisations to maintain a free and better service to the 'poor'.

Diversity is the key to survival. At Sheffield we have tried the following methods for generating income:-

1. **A Zoological Consultancy Service:** Field surveys, identification and analysis. Mainly invertebrates but also bats, amphibians and badgers. We do not tender, but offer a service at a fixed price to customers who wish to pay - a 'quality' service - there, I've said it!

[Our own Ecology Unit, formed in 1986, later grew into the City Ecology Unit with its own budget. In 1991 it developed a consultancy wing offering a comprehensive ecological service. More recently it has formed a partnership with Sheffield Hallam University - the Sheffield Centre for Ecology and Environmental Management (SCEEM). Staff levels have increased from 2 to about 19. The City Ecology Unit still exists within the Museum as a core City Council function but it is mutually supportive of SCEEM]

There is an internal market whereby we (the curatorial Natural History Section) provide a specialist service to SCEEM, usually as part of larger projects. It sounds complex, but it seems to work well.

Our other customers have included ADAS, British Coal, R.J.Budge, Peak Park Joint Planning Board, other local authorities and private ecological consultancies.

In 1994 and 1995 we collaborated with Sheffield University to research the Auvergne area of France. Unfortunately these field trips were little more than a week long but were entirely funded by external monies. Still, it is important, I think, that provincial museums do not become too parochial, although it is difficult for us to justify such pleasant work abroad for more than a short period each year. Local issues have priority.

2. **Geology:** In 1995 Gaynor Boon secured substantial funding to conserve the unique Middlewood Fossil Forest in Sheffield. Gaynor and Paul Richards did much of the fieldwork and project management in collaboration with South Yorkshire RIGS Group. Staff time was costed into the project.

3. **Meteorological Data:** Sheffield City Museum has operated the city's official weather station since 1882. Data, collected on a daily basis are validated by the Met. Office. A public service is delivered to about 10,000 customers each year. Much of the service is free, but charges are made to commercial organisations such as insurance companies and loss adjusters, insurance claimants requiring 'real time' wind data (a special new service) and City Council Departments. A subscription charge to a monthly weather information sheet also generates income.

4. **Invertebrate Identification Day Schools:** Part of our Sheffield Biodiversity Research Project aims to provide training in the identification of less popular taxa. Our series of Saturday Dayschools has included sessions on Carabidae, Millipedes, Hoverflies, Spiders, Soldierflies and on geological topics. We charge £9 per day and re-invest the income in microscopes and bench facilities. Accommodation for 12 'students' is now available in the Invertebrate Study Room, where reference collections are available as part of the dayschool. These dayschools have proved to be very popular, attracting people from an 80 mile radius, generating income, increasing collection use and raising the standards of taxonomic expertise. An enlarged programme is planned for 1996.

5. **Grant Aid:** It is possible to be much more positive and

confident when applying for grant aid knowing that matching money can be generated. In the past five years Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council RECAP (Reclassification and Access Projects) and ACCESS grants have been key to our collection management programme. Vast improvements, previously unthinkable, have been made to storage and visitor access to collections.

**6. Fund Raising:** Just ask people to give you money! Art curators do it all the time. In 1992, hot on the heels of the Rio Earth Summit, we formed the Sheffield Biodiversity Research Project with clear aims and objectives. We asked for public donations and raised £1,750 in no time. A 'Freeze-drier Appeal' also had an excellent response. Naturalists, birders and wildlife enthusiasts are most generous to a good cause.

**7. Exhibitions and Events:** Paul Richards has reviewed these income generating activities in a separate paper (Richards, this issue). My only additional comment is to watch out for opportunities. When Kokoro displayed their robotic dinosaurs at Ponds Forge International Sports Complex, we set up a display of large skeletons to amuse the long queues of punters. We negotiated £1,000 to provide and ostrich, camel, manatee, elephant skull and assorted horns and skulls. It was the easiest money we ever made; less than two days work and the customers were delighted. The skeletons looked fabulous set amongst the rocks and palm trees adjacent to the leisure pool (very consistent humidity levels!).

### Conclusions

There is no doubt that income generation has saved the Natural History Section at Sheffield Museum so far *and* allowed greater investment in resources than ever before. But there is a price to pay in terms of loss of traditional functions.

Amongst the problems are that the core service suffers (you spend more time out on contracts). Core budget never returns (while ever you are successful). You spend more time on finance administration (mainly a problem for me as cost centre manager). *But:* our staff feel more secure, you have more budget control, pay for more resources, equipment and activity, and more records and specimens are generated.

I hope these examples provide ideas for some inspiration to others and salvation to a few. We do not advocate income generation as the way forward for all museums. If you have reasonable staff levels and a good core budget, stick with it. On the other hand if cutbacks or worse are looming and your service looks like getting the axe, think about it!

### Appendix

#### Natural History Section core staff 1995:

Derek Whiteley	Principal Keeper, Natural History
Gaynor Boon	Assistant Keeper, Meteorology/Earth Sciences
Paul Richards	Assistant Keeper, Nat.Hist.Conservation
Tracey Owen	Clerical Officer (0.5 fte)

#### City Ecology Unit core staff 1995

Jean Glassock	Senior City Ecologist
Julie Westfold	Assistant Ecologist
Lucy Heath	SWAP Project Development Officer
Jane Haigh	SWAP Assistant Project Development Officer

[SWAP is the Sheffield Wildlife Action Partnership – a partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust enabling and promoting wildlife in the community.

### FREEZE DRYING – PRESENT KNOWLEDGE AND AREAS FOR RESEARCH

**Speakers:** Pete Morgan, Paul Richards, Geoff Yates.

[Brief notes by Charles Pettitt]

#### Some Advantages of Freeze Drying:

Freeze-drying easy to do; no cutting, dissection or nasty chemicals required.

One can preserve far more small vertebrate specimens than by conventional study skin preparation; also preserves *all* body parts (although reconstitution not yet tested, but freeze-dried specimens should be much better for DNA studies in future).

By preparing a bird with one wing out handling damage is reduced, and it is also good for nature artists who are major users of bird skin collections.

Small birds or bats, once freeze dried, can mounted on large pin similar to insect mount; again this makes handling easier and reduces risk of damage from abrasion while stored. Bats should be prepared with mouth open, again to make examination easier without the risk of damage.

#### Drawbacks: Freeze-drying is -

a) Expensive to set-up – the equipment has high capital cost.

b) Expensive to run – requires lots of electricity.

c) Expensive to maintain – maintenance costs on the machinery are high, and it *does* sometimes go wrong!

d) If machine does break-down during a run, especially if it is early in the cycle, it can cause great damage to the specimens being processed.

#### General points:

Lipids sometimes liquify after freeze drying, and can cause greasy stains.

Soft-bodied invertebrates (eg. caterpillars) work extremely well, but need careful mounting while drying, otherwise get crinkly-winged dragonflies, etc.

#### Discussion:

There is still a pest problem with freeze dried material, though. There was some discussion on the advantages of freeze-drying as a method of pest control; *ie.* if extract all the oxygen and water as well as freezing then this should kill pests more quickly. No resolution of this problem was arrived at, but it was agreed that the subject could form the basis of a future 'specialist' BCG meeting.

#### Feedback requested:

Is anyone doing research on the use of freeze-drying, particularly for pest control purposes? Would a specialist meeting be useful? If you have any views please contact Geoff Yates at Bolton Museum (Bolton BL1 1SE).

### DEVELOPMENT OF A BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE AT BOLTON MUSEUM

*Kathryn Berry, Bolton Museum*

In the 1980s there was a change of emphasis away from collecting to recording.

The reasons were threefold:

- 1) Lack of space to store ever-increasing collections.
- 2) Greater awareness of environmental issues developing in council, local societies and public.