What we've learned about developing educational resources

Practical ideas on how to create activities for teachers to use off-site

When you're planning the new resource...

Think about **why** you want to develop the resource and **for whom**. Is it something teachers need and want? Does it support your organisation's aims, and national education strategies? Is it a unique idea or do similar things already exist? Is it linked to **something your museum does best** or is known for? Will it suit your particular audience?

When you are coming up with new ideas...

Generate **lots of ideas** initially. Talk to teachers and students to check on the subject and format of resources they would welcome and really use. When you have a firmer idea of the topics you intend to cover, research **National Curriculum links** and the **vocabulary** used to teach the topic. You may have a regular teacher panel or other contacts you can use, or you can get new teachers involved. Make sure there is an incentive for being involved, and always send a nice thank you letter.

When you are developing the resource...

One really good resource is better than several average ones, so only develop as many resources as you can do well. Project-plan your process, creating a **timeline** and **checklist** of what you need to do, and a rough **budget** for each stage. Communicate your **milestones** to colleagues, especially those whose input you will need, and any external parties like designers or photographers.

Use staff time effectively by developing resources during quieter times. Volunteers may be able to help, and **teachers** may welcome the chance to contribute during holiday periods as part of their CPD.

Keep good records of your development process, including what worked and didn't work, how long things took, unexpected findings etc, so that you develop a **robust framework for next time**.

When formatting your resource materials...

Develop a consistent **house style** for your materials so that teachers recognise a familiar and trustworthy format. Use the same font each time, short chunks of text and numbered stages or pages. To create a resource sheet for students, use **limited words**, lots of **pictures** and plenty of white space. To create notes for teachers, use a consistent order and format, with sub-headings and short paragraphs. Provide top-line links to the National Curriculum, and consider including **real-life** careers links drawn from interviews with relevant contacts.

Photos are very useful in instructions – make sure they print and photocopy well. **Video** is even better for complex instructions, and can be produced using a cheap video camera (and presented in an informal way, for example, 'going behind the scenes' of a particular demonstration). In all photography and video, make sure props are clean and staff are dressed consistently and chosen to show diversity (age, gender, ethnicity).

When you are testing the resource...

Trial the resource at several stages – initial ideas, during development and final draft. When you feel each stage is complete, show it to a few people who've never seen it before to check it makes sense. Test resources with both **teachers and students**, and find a range of ages, gender, types of schools, levels of experience etc. You won't please everyone but it will give you enormous **insight** into real users. Be aware that some of your advisors may be wary of unfamiliar ideas, and consider this before abandoning something innovative.

A note on photography...

Images and video of under-18s need parental/guardian permission in advance to be used in resources. If you want to use pictures or video of over-18s in which individuals can be identified, you still need permission, even if they are museum volunteers.

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Further resources:

See educational resources we have recently developed at the Science Museum by visiting:
www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/educators/classroom_and_homework_resources.aspx

Read a summary of key findings from a Science Museum Research report covering 18 months of work with teachers:

- Science Museum Research Summary: What teachers want from classroom resources

If you're a teacher, visit our training pages to see what opportunities for Continuing Professional Development we currently offer:

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/educators/whats_on_for_teachers/professional_development.aspx

Find out how to work with teachers as advisors on new resources by reading another sheet in the *What we've learned* series:

- What we've learned about running teachers' advisory panels

Request example documents by contacting learning@sciencemuseum.org.uk:

- an example thank you letter for teachers who act as advisors for your projects.

- an example of a model release form for photography.