



NatSCA

Natural Sciences Collections Association

<http://www.natsca.org>

NSCG Newsletter

Title: View From The Chair

Author(s): Entwistle, B.

Source: Entwistle, B. (2000). View From The Chair. *NSCG Newsletter, Issue 15*, 2 - 3.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/647>

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

View from the chair

Dear members,

Your intrepid chairman has just recently returned from "oop north", Stoke-on-Trent to be exact. The NSCG, well me actually on your behalf, organised and ran a one-day seminar on *Best Value*. For those of you who are not employed by local government this will mean nothing to you, for those of you who are it will either bore or terrify you.

Best Value is the Labour Governments' alternative to Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). It aims to ensure that the public are receiving best value as regards the services they pay their local authority to provide. If these services can be provided more efficiently and more cost effectively by other providers, then you are in trouble.

The speakers were Joe Sage from Dundee Museums, Jane Arthur from Birmingham City Museums, Dr Darryl Mead from Glasgow Museums, and Wayne Longshore the Assistant Chief Executive from Stoke City Council.

Unfortunately, few people decided to attend the seminar, which was very disappointing considering the time, and effort that went into its' organisation, not to mention the quality of the speakers. Perhaps people think that it won't affect them, but unfortunately, it will.

As one who has gone through *Best Value*, it was interesting to see the different ways institutions approached the process. The question and answer sessions were especially helpful as they allowed the delegates to pose specific questions to the speakers about their own *Best Value* problems. The day gave everyone who attended food for thought. Only a handful of those who attended were NSCG members. It was gratifying to note that after the seminar, I, on behalf of the NSCG, was thanked for organising the day.

I have no doubt there will be similar *Best Value* seminars in the future run by other groups as the legislation begins to take effect, but there will be few with such good speakers. Joe Sage and Jane Arthur gave very good papers taking us through how their services dealt with the legislation, and how they organised themselves internally to amass the tremendous amount of information needed to write the report.

Wayne Longshore gave an overview of how *Best Value* was being tackled by a city authority, and just how much time and money the process was costing. Dr Mead took a different view and used the process to highlight the deficiencies in the museum service in Glasgow and what had to be done before the service could provide best value to the charge payers. An interesting turn around on the view that one has to cast one's own museum service in the best possible light. You could say we had two strategies; one defensive and one offensive, both of which it seems have been successful. As I noted at the conference, there is no right way of carrying out this process, however, there are a lot of wrong ways. It is essential that conservators in local authorities are forewarned and forearmed and that they make their voices heard when their report is being written. One of the areas that can be easily outsourced is conservation.

In these days of cutbacks, conservators are seen increasingly as an expensive luxury. Conservators as a profession need to stand up and shout exactly what it is they do and make our employers understand how important a conservator is to the safety and preservation of their collections. Conservators, by their nature, are not used to doing this.

The *Best Value* process is so important to local authority museums that we have decided, if possible, to produce a special *Best Value* publication containing the speakers talks. However, since trying to get copy out of speakers is like trying to get a wage increase from a local authority this may be some time in coming. Consequently, Joe Sage's paper is published in this edition of the newsletter and hopefully the others will appear in due course. I would like to thank Keith Bloor and Don Steward from the Potteries Museum Stoke-on-Trent for providing us with a venue, and the speakers who provided us with a stimulating day.

On a different note, our newsletter editor can only print what you the membership send in. Keep the NSCG newsletter vibrant by sending in your articles, conference reviews, book reviews and news items.

My regards to you all,

Bob Entwistle