



Crafts Council / Education

Craft Journey

Taneesha Ahmed / Gallery Educator



Taneesha Ahmed. Photo © Jules Lister

What I do

As the Participation Producer at The Tetley in Leeds, my role involves organising and planning a range of activities for families, children, young people, schools and sometimes vulnerable adults, for example, adults with learning disabilities or mental health issues. The Tetley is an art gallery and space for learning, and a lot of my work is about making sure the gallery is accessible and that we reach new audiences, especially communities from South Leeds.

No day is the same: sometimes I could be in meetings with anyone from artists, teachers, to councillors; other days I might be cleaning the learning studio and ordering art materials for our family art workshops and sometimes supporting artists to deliver their work.

Jobs in museums and galleries

There are lots of different jobs and roles in gallery learning, education and participation. A lot of those jobs are managing different programmes of activity, for example, working with schools to ensure they visit the museum and gallery. I work with a lot of volunteers too—many organisations need the extra help to deliver ambitious projects.

Additionally, we work with a lot of freelance artists and project managers, which is another area of work to explore. This allows some artists to work more flexibly on different projects with different organisations.



The Tetley, Leeds. Photo © David Lindsey

Why craft?

From a young age I really enjoyed going to galleries and they seemed like interesting places to work. The more I developed my creative voice in my studies, the more I felt I'd like my voice represented in the art galleries I visited.

When I grew up there weren't many people who looked like me working in the arts, so I wanted to be an artist so I could be a role model for others. Over time I realised I wanted to work in the gallery sector to make an impact and to see a change when it comes to diversity and representation.

What I studied at school

- AS Level: Chemistry, Maths, English Literature, Art and Design
- A Level: Maths, English Literature, Art and Design
- Art and Design Foundation Diploma

I didn't have a lot of guidance from family about having a creative career, so they were hesitant about supporting these choices. I was very academic, so they really wanted me to have a career in something more stable or traditional such as medicine, law or accounting. In the end, I made these choices independently with the support of my art teachers and other staff. I knew I wanted to experience art school and be able to explore ideas and be creative on my own terms—something that I knew many people don't get to experience.



The Tetley Weekender. Photo © Amy Heycock.

What I studied after school

After going to college in Manchester, I moved to Leeds to study Fine Art at the University of Leeds. It was a great course, that was both academic and creative. It had lots of well established art historians teaching seminars, such as feminist scholars like Griselda Pollock.

I felt the course's mix of history of art, cultural studies, and a creative studio practice was a good basis for a career as an artist and also gave me the knowledge I'd need to move in to the gallery and museum sector.

I think having this broad spectrum enabled me to realise I enjoyed the mix of both, and this inspired me to take my education further, so a few years down the line I decided I would study a Masters in Curating at Chelsea College of Arts in London.

My career path

In some ways, there is no set training path to working in gallery learning and participation. It's about gaining skills and experiences that are transferable.

From graduation, it took eight years to build up my experience to get my first salaried job in the arts as the Education Officer at Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool. In that time I worked in retail and education, volunteered for other galleries and ran my own artistic and curatorial projects. I saw all this as invaluable training to take on the responsibility of an art gallery's education programme.

Luckily I was able to live cheaply with my parents back in Manchester. This enabled me to volunteer at galleries and festivals across the North West, helping me learn about the infrastructure in the arts before moving to London. I realised I didn't want to be juggling part-time work with other projects, and I decided to apply for a teaching assistant role in a school, eventually becoming an arts technician. Working in a school was a defining point in my career, as I became passionate about engaging with children and young people to ensure they were accessing arts and culture. The skills and knowledge I gained working in the education sector helped me to get my job as a gallery Education Officer.

Important decisions

After taking the first step of going to university, the second biggest and most important decision was applying for my Masters degree in Curating. I knew I wanted to study and live in London, as it's the creative capital of the UK in many ways; there are more art galleries, museums and artist-run spaces, but the tuition fees were steadily increasing and I couldn't afford to move without financial support. I decided to take a career development loan, as I



The Tetley Weekender. Photo © Amy Heycock.

realised the networks I'd make in London would be an investment for my future career.

Although my career has taken many turns, the Masters degree has helped me stand out from other applicants, and I firmly believe that having the experience of living and studying in London has shaped who I am in ways I can't always explain.

Challenges

My parents worried that I wouldn't be able to have a successful career in the arts. They didn't always believe that I could achieve these goals which sometimes meant I lacked confidence in areas, but it also inspired me to work harder than my peers.

The sector is very competitive, there are lots of great creative courses and talented graduates who all want to work in the same jobs and unfortunately there are not many positions around. I applied for lots of different roles and had multiple rejections, over time I learned to not take it personally and believe that the right organisation will see how I would be a good fit for them.

Everyone has a different story to tell, which is why I'm really passionate about making the arts sector more inclusive and diverse, so we are all represented and our voices heard.

My advice to you

As there are no set paths to working in the arts or creative sector, it can sometimes be very hard to see how you will achieve your own goals.

Firstly, I would identify a few role models, and see what they did to get where they are. That means researching whether they studied at university, or whether they learnt new skills from just working in the sector. Everyone has a different story, so it's worth finding out what steps people took to get where they are.

It is important to know what the sector is like, and there might be opportunities to take part in programmes designed for young people, as well as volunteering on projects, which are great ways of getting to know how other people got to where they are today. Try to research as many job roles as possible and see which works best for your personality.

Craft Careers

Craft generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy each year, with the contribution of the wider creative industries now growing at twice the rate of the UK economy. British craft has never been so sought-after and craft skills are revolutionising industries from aerospace to architecture.

To learn more about craft careers visit:
www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers



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