

Chandan Mahal

Learning and Partnership Manager

**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Learning and Partnership Manager

Organisation: British Library

Location: London, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I have been working in the museum, gallery and heritage sector for twenty years, with a background in interpretation, public programming and audience development. My role has had a particular focus on developing programmes that explore community heritage, specifically African and South Asian heritage through different archives and collections.

Currently I work part time at the British Library, where I am responsible for the national learning and engagement strategy for the 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage' project. My first job in museums involved working on community engagement projects at the Museum of London and Victoria & Albert Museum. My BA in Fashion Design and MA in Visual Culture were both important for opening opportunities to work in museums as a gallery educator and to work on exhibition teams and gallery projects on a wide range of subjects including London's history of migration.

W: www.rgs.org/geographyprofessionals

Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

The most useful experience was whilst working in the Asian women's centre as a community and youth worker, where I had the opportunity to work on creative projects with the V & A and act as a liaison between two very different types of organisations. This is what inspired me to want to work in the museum environment to develop opportunities to work with audiences that were often excluded from these spaces. My community experience and education in art history and design enabled me to bring those skills to my first job in a museum.

What do you do as part of your role?

At the British Library I work on a project called 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage' which is working with ten partners across the UK to digitise 160,000 of the most rare or vulnerable audio recordings. These include sound recordings of music, wildlife, accents and dialects, oral history, radio, poetry and drama performance etc. My role oversees the national learning and engagement programme, including digital learning resources. Even though my role is mainly project management working with staff and partners to deliver the project, in a typical week I am often involved in meetings with project members, curators and learning staff to identify content we might use, which themes and subjects the website will feature, which partner organisations we will work with and consulting with them to find out how this material can support people with different needs.

How does geography feature in your work/ what difference does it make?

There are many geographic associations with this project, including the geographical locations of the ten partners and their regional audio archive material. The geographical sounds and



memories are central to this project and involves a wide range of people from different backgrounds to interpret and respond creatively to this material and enable these audio archives to be made available online to thousands of users.

Do you get to travel for your role?

I get to travel to different parts of the UK to visit the Hub partners for this project. This includes annual visits to Dublin, Glasgow, Aberystwyth, Newcastle, Norfolk, Manchester, Brighton, Bristol and Leicester.

What might you be doing in five years time?

As I have worked in museums for many years for me the next steps are to continue in project management roles or to do my own research in museums and archives. I am also doing a PhD part time at Queen Mary University of London which is a partnership with the RGS (with IBG), and I am interested to develop the research ideas from this as part of my career progression.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go into this career?

There are many opportunities to have a career in archives, museums and libraries and many different job roles within the heritage sector. My advice would be to get as much volunteering experience as possible or take up traineeships and placements if available. There are many volunteer opportunities in the heritage sector, and it is worth doing this to gain different experiences and to build up CVs.