

Effective Collections

Achievements and legacy

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MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION

Effective
Collections



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With thanks to the generous support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, to the dedication of the people involved in Effective Collections projects and to the Museums Association's project coaches, Emma Chaplin, Sarah Daly, Paul Fraser Webb, Joanne Irvine and Alison Porter

Cover image: National Museums Scotland, STICK, Old Tools, New Uses project

Abbreviations

ACE Arts Council
England

CyMAL Museums
Archives
and Libraries Wales

DCMS Department for
Culture Media and
Sport

HLF Heritage Lottery
Fund

NMDC National
Museum
Directors' Conference

NMS National
Museums Scotland

MA Museums
Association

SHGC Social History
Curator's Group

STICK Scottish
Transport and
Industrial Collections
Network

UCL University
College London

UKRG UK Registrars
Group

Foreword

Esmée Fairbairn first supported the Museums Association's work with collections in 2004 through a grant towards the research for the report *Collections for the Future*, which set out to reinvigorate debate about the role and purpose of museum collections. We had been aware for some time that there was a thirst to make collections more dynamic and when the MA approached us to support *Effective Collections* the proposal chimed with our interests and had the potential to bring about a significant culture shift within the museum sector. We were impressed by the MA's plans to encourage long-term loans and the permanent transfer and disposal of items from museum collections.

Since 2005 there have of course been a number of changes to the project, particularly in the scale of its impact. A plan to achieve 15 peer reviews, 500 loans and 300 transfers has ended up with 28 reviews and 1000s of disposals or transfers. Two of the supported projects – Dorset County and the Booth Museum – have made over 500 loans between them. In addition *Effective Collections* developed a model of coaching for museum staff, which has become an essential element of the success of this work.

Our interest in the development and use of collections led to Esmée Fairbairn's *Museums and Heritage Collections Strand* which ran from 2008-2010 and we are delighted that the ethos of this fund, combined with the findings from *Effective Collections* are being taken forward through the *Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund*, funded by Esmée Fairbairn and managed by the MA.

We hope that the findings of the *Effective Collections* report, together with the MA's ongoing work, will continue to have a significant impact on the use and engagement with museum collections in the future.

Dawn Austwick
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation



Executive summary and recommendations



1.1

Effective Collections has been the cornerstone of the MA's work on collections since late in 2006. Supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, it is a programme of policy work and grant-giving to help museums make better use of stored collections, principally through increased numbers of loans and a more proactive approach to disposal. In just five years, the MA has sought to change the culture of museums.

1.2

Markers for the success of Effective Collections and indicators of a culture change outlined in this report include:

- Over 40 projects, involving well over 100 museums, have made better, more creative use of collections through Effective Collections grants (part 1).
- The knowledge and confidence of individuals involved in projects has grown, and through a model of coaching and peer networks, organisations have changed their approach to working with collections (part 3). Projects have demonstrated a way of working that has been effective in supporting knowledge and skill sharing, and in translating project work into organisational change (part 1).
- Attitudes to disposal have changed in the last five years; it is now seen as a responsible part of collections management (part 2). The MA has changed the Code of Ethics regarding disposal and published a Disposal Toolkit, which has been used by a third of museums. The MA will produce further guidance on sales in 2012 in partnership with the Accreditation team at ACE.

- Collections reviews have grown as an area of work and have been embraced by museums within Effective Collections and beyond. Of the 34 full phase Effective Collections projects, 28 conducted a review and the experience they gained (part 4) is now available to all museums on the Effective Collections online learning hub, www.museumsassociation.org/collections.
- Signs of a shift in approach to loans are beginning to emerge, often through an increased readiness by museums to work in partnership to share collections, skills and knowledge. The MA published Smarter Loans in 2012 to both increase the number of loans taking place and maximise their impact. Two-thirds of museums are already aware of the project (part 2).

Policy developments across the sector, though less directly attributable to Effective Collections, have supported a change in the culture of museums to expect to use collections more:

- HLF has amended its grant application process in recent years to place greater emphasis on a museum's public impact plans through exhibition or loan of new acquisitions. The Art Fund is reviewing the public benefit of its grant making in detail, having asked applicants about use and impact of supported acquisitions for several years. HLF is also considering how to build on its work with Collecting Cultures and Skills for the Future in its strategic plan for 2013-19
- Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have all either published or started developing a national museum strategy in the last five years. Each of the strategies discusses collections use and commits to working towards dynamic collections, improving public benefit from collections and even, in the case of Wales, establishing a distributed national collection
- PAS197, a code of practice for cultural collections management, was published in 2009 with a more holistic approach to collections development, incorporating acquisition, use, information, care and disposal. This is reflected in the 2011 Accreditation standard.



1.3

The museum sector has made better use of stored collections in the last five years and the MA remains committed to the principles of Effective Collections. The following commitments will ensure the success of Effective Collections is sustained and built upon:

The MA will continue to run the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. This grant fund has been running since January 2011 and awards £800,000 per year to museums for time-limited projects working to improve knowledge and use of collections.

The MA will continue to run Find an Object. The web listing service for loans and disposals is well used, with around 100 adverts at any one time.

The MA will present key learning from projects on the Effective Collections online learning hub, www.museumsassociation.org/collections. This will include resources produced by projects.

The MA will publish Due Diligence Guidelines on Sales

in 2012, in partnership with the Accreditation team at ACE. The guidance will support museums to make responsible decisions and outline when they should consult Accreditation and ethics committees.

The MA will build its learning from Effective Collections into future policy work. This knowledge will inform policy messages given to funding bodies and feed into the MA's renewed focus on workforce issues and its new area of work, Museums 2020.

Through Museums 2020, the MA will create a bold vision for the future of museums and their impact across the UK.

1.4

Other parts of the museum sector should also take on key messages from Effective Collections:

Museums should fully embed the principle of improved use of collections into their future work.

Effective Collections case studies can help museums improve the public benefit they get from their collections, a vital approach that will help them make difficult decisions about how to allocate limited resources.

Museum directors should value loans as a core activity and adopt the principles of Smarter Loans. Directors are figureheads with an overview that allows them to see the wider benefits of loans and enact change. They should know when their museum rejects a loan request and why.

Funders should only support collections reviews that have a clear purpose and outcomes for use of collections and public impact. Reviews should show the value of collections management in facilitating these objectives.

Funders should consider new ways to support sharing of collections and to encourage a sense of common good through partnership working. An outward-looking, altruistic ethos helps short-term project funding to benefit the wider museum sector.

Policy-makers and groups responsible for museum development should learn from the coaching and peer support networks in Effective Collections. This report describes the benefits that come from working in less formal ways and shows that, when funders are willing to allow greater flexibility, museums can excel.

Funders supporting workforce development programmes should look into the potential of nurturing individual champions for change. The Ways of working section of this report describes how supporting passionate individuals can facilitate broad organisational changes. This could be key to nurturing a rising generation of influential museum professionals.



Part 1:

Achievements and legacy



Sally Colvin

Introduction

1

1.1

Effective Collections launched in late 2006, emerging from the findings of the MA's 2005 report, Collections for the Future. The scheme was supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation with a grant of just over £1m and one clear aim: to help museums make better use of stored collections. This report will examine change over the last five years, drawing on the original aims of Effective Collections, the plans and projects set in place by the MA and the work undertaken across the museum sector.

1.2

Over the last five years, the sector has changed enormously, not least as a result of the global economic crisis and changes in government across the UK. The MA and Effective Collections have sought to adapt alongside. This report will look forward to what the sector should do next and make recommendations for museums and policy makers, as well as identifying some of the challenges that remain.

1.3

Though Effective Collections has come to an end, the MA's work on collections will continue, particularly through management of the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund for time-limited projects working to improve knowledge and use of collections.



What is Effective Collections?

2

2.1

Effective Collections is a programme made up of both policy work and its practical application through grant funding to museums. The programme had a pilot phase from 2006-09 and a three year full phase from April 2009 to March 2012.

2.2

Over the course of Effective Collections, and thanks to the flexibility of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the component parts of the programme grew into different areas of work, all of which were united by an aim to help museums make better use of stored collections.

2.3

In the full phase of Effective Collections, 34 grants worth between £10,000 and £25,000 were awarded to museums over four competitive funding rounds. Many projects incorporated multiple partners and over 100 museums in total have been involved with Effective Collections work. The selection criteria for full phase projects were informed by nine projects run during the pilot phase of Effective Collections. Analysis in this report of the projects funded shows the breadth of impacts that came from working in a focused way with collections.

2.4

Find an Object was launched in 2009 as an online service to advertise objects available from museums as disposals or loans. Listings are also summarised monthly in Museums Journal. By March 2012, 767 adverts had been placed and feedback from advertisers shows that approximately half of the items advertised go on to find new homes thanks to Find an Object.

2.5

Through Effective Collections, the MA has undertaken a body of culture change work aimed at influencing policy and promoting changes to museums, under the umbrella term “use of collections”. This has included advocating museum collections as a resource to be used for public benefit now, not just preserved for future generations; taking steps to simplify the loans process as a means of sharing collections for public impact; and promoting a proactive approach to disposal as part of responsible collections management.

Culture change work	Description
Collections for the Future, 2005 Making Collections Effective, 2007 Collections Knowledge consultation, 2008 Effective Collections programme prospectus, 2009 Effective Collections policy wish list, 2009 Sustainability consultation and report, 2009 <i>Effective Collections: achievements and legacy, 2012</i>	MA reports, consultations and planning documents that set out the aims of the Association’s work on collections. At a high level, they define the principles that the MA has promoted to museums and has sought to relate to practice through Effective Collections.
Simple Loans Administration, 2007 Survey on potential for a skills standard for loans, 2008 Discussion of attitudes to risk, 2009 Smarter Loans, 2012	The original plans for Effective Collections identified loans as a prime means of increasing use of stored collections. However, as discussed in part 4 of this report, it has been more challenging than expected to stimulate change in this area.
Training series on collections review, in partnership with UCL, 2009-10 Museum Practice on collections review, 2010	This work highlighted a trend towards museums reviewing parts or all of their collections. Together with funding museums to undertake collections reviews, the MA sought to influence them to conduct reviews with specific outcomes in mind for increasing the use and sustainability of collections.
Changes to the Code of Ethics for Museums, 2007 Disposal Toolkit, 2008 Training series in using the Disposal Toolkit, 2008-10 <i>Due Diligence Guidelines on Sales, in partnership with Accreditation team, 2012</i> <i>Guidance on charity law and disposal, 2012</i>	A central theme of Effective Collections has been a proactive approach to disposal in sustainable collections development. Museums have embraced this approach and are therefore facing new challenges raised by sales from collections and legal issues within different governance structures. Some of the final work from Effective Collections will be to provide additional support in these areas.

2.6

Effective Collections has both inspired and reflected the mood of the museum sector. Lots of museums have independently undertaken work in the spirit of Effective Collections and investment has been committed through initiatives like the Reviewing Significance project undertaken by Renaissance East Midlands. HLF, the Art Fund, the Collections Trust and the Accreditation team at ACE have all brought sustainable collections development and use to the fore. While this report is about Effective Collections, it is important to recognise that a change in approach across the sector results from collective effort.

Loans

3

3.1

Effective Collections has championed loans as a primary means of getting more collections out of storage. Policy work in this area culminated in the publication of Smarter Loans, a set of key principles for lending and borrowing in UK museums, in February 2012. Projects in both the pilot and full phases of Effective Collections have demonstrated the value of loans in broadening audiences and developing working partnerships between museums.

3.2

Through grants and Find an Object, the MA has tried to develop a supplier-led approach to loans.

This is an application of the principle that it is a museum's duty to share its collection as widely as possible for maximum public impact. The William Morris Society's Effective Collections project sought to promote its collection for loan, where the process may be easier than going to larger museums in which loans are oversubscribed. NMS demonstrates a positive approach to loans by advertising them on its website, as does the Royal Armouries, which publishes a map online showing where loans end up worldwide.

However, many museums could do more, and perhaps would, if they truly valued loans as a core activity. Find an Object can be used to promote the availability of loans. For example, the British Museum used it to advertise the availability of the Pharaoh: King of Egypt touring exhibition, which led to the inclusion of Dorset County Museum on the tour, bringing about a 400% increase in visitors to the museum. Find an Object will continue to be run by the MA and museums should consider using it both for disposals and loans.



3.3

Many museums beyond the Effective Collections cohort are very good at using loans to increase public impact. The Captain Cook Museum in Whitby borrows nationally significant items every year for a temporary exhibition programme that significantly increases its visitor numbers and profile with funders and local audiences. Dunwich Museum borrowed a set of seals from the British Museum as part of the Something Borrowed project for their Seals by the Sea exhibition in 2011, a loan which proved to be a catalyst for the first formal learning and events programme in the museum's history.

In these examples, loans are targeted at venues where the host museum has thought about the way it wants to work with audiences. Often the loan is accompanied by a greater level of partnership, passing on, for example, handling skills or specialist knowledge of objects. Partnership loans are commonly thought of as national museums sharing their riches, but to really maximise the benefits of loans, national museums could do more to make it a two-way process and learn from the loans they make to influence their work with audiences.

3.4

Museums still need to do more to value loans as a core activity that allows engagement with audiences. For lenders as well as borrowers, the core activity of loans merits an allocation of resources, even in the challenging times museums currently face. Smarter Loans outlines the principles on which to lend, borrow and value the benefits of loans. The evaluation in part 2 of this report shows that more loan requests are made and received now than five years ago, but there is room for further improvement. 65% of museums are now aware of Smarter Loans, so the next step for them is to start applying the principles to both increase the number of loans and maximise the benefits that come from them.

3.5

There are valid reasons why increasing loans has been more challenging than expected. At the start of Effective Collections, it was widely believed that museums needed a standard loan form similar to the UKRG's standard facilities report, which would sweep away the bureaucracy around loans. Over the last five years, the MA has tried different approaches to encourage museums to make loans simpler, cheaper and more common. These measures included the publication of Simple Loans Administration in 2007; a survey the following year examining the likely uptake of an accredited skills standard for borrowers; and discussions in 2009 examining approaches to risk. In all cases, the work was warmly received in theory but had little impact in practice.

3.6

One reason why a single template for lending didn't work is the varied nature of the museum sector, where large and small museums have different ways of managing loans and difficulty relating to each other's situations - a distinguishing feature being whether a museum is large enough to employ registrars and conservators.

Another reason is the variety of objects contained in a museum collection; the requirements for borrowing a natural history research specimen are clearly very different to those of a watercolour painting. Museums indicated - particularly regarding the skills standard for borrowers - that so many caveats would be required for quite a high proportion of objects that the proposed system would be unworkable.

3.7

A further difficulty highlighted by the MA's work on risk is that, within larger organisations, decisions are not just made by one person but come from different individuals responsible for different aspects of the loans process. The drive to share collections and overcome barriers about, for example, environmental standards, tends to come from individuals who champion change. Museum directors are in the position both to see the breadth of benefits loans bring, and to make decisions that make loans core to the working of their museum.

Museum directors should consider Smarter Loans and champion ways of sharing collections at their organisations. However, Effective Collections shows that other people within museums can also champion change, especially when they focus that change on a particular project and promote the benefits it brings (see Ways of working section). A challenge for the sector is how to encourage and support those individuals to shape the museums of the future.





3.8

Nearly half of Effective Collections participants included loans as an explicit part of their project. But this statistic doesn't do justice to the other steps they took to share collections, such as conducting reminiscence sessions with dementia sufferers; teaching fashion history to university students; and running mock-archaeological digs for under-fives. Just within the Effective Collections cohort, this range demonstrates that museums are constantly seeking ways to create richer experiences with audiences and facilitate deeper engagement using collections. Often, collections can create a link to partners beyond the museum sector.

The Fast Forward survey of West Midlands museums in 2010 showed that, of museums making short-term loans, 58% made loans to education groups and 51% to local communities. While the MA anticipated that loans would enable the sharing of collections, knowledge and experiences, the original vision for Effective Collections didn't fully recognise the much more diverse means that museums use to maximise the public impact from their collections. Loans remain a central means of sharing collections, but public impact can be much greater by thinking in terms of "loans plus", where sharing is at the centre of multiple, flexible ways of communicating and engaging with people.

Disposal and collections review

4

4.1

Alongside loans, Effective Collections has encouraged museums to take a more proactive approach to disposal. Through changes to the Code of Ethics in 2007 and the publication of the Disposal Toolkit in 2008, Effective Collections has emphasised the part disposal plays in responsible collections management. Collections review has formed part of 28 out of 34 Effective Collections projects and disposal has been central to the aims of 14. It continues to be a strong feature in applications to the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund.

4.2

Collections review and disposal seem timely as many museum stores approach capacity and museums face the inevitable tension between growing collections and shrinking resources. The MA's consultation into sustainability in 2008 looked at museums' environmental, economic and social impacts and ways in which museums can improve this triple bottom line. The need to rationalise collections, use them more and balance their environmental and economic burden against social impact, was strongly supported – albeit with concerns about long-term preservation.

The enormous changes over the last 15 years in the ways that museums work with audiences and communities also means many are questioning whether the earlier, encyclopaedic approach to collecting is still necessary.



4.3

The rise of collections reviews and a proactive approach to disposal is one of the biggest achievements of Effective Collections. Collections for the Future (2005) highlighted the problem that disposal presented to the museum sector: "Disposal is not risk free, but neither is unthinking retention." Changes to the Code of Ethics and development of the Disposal Toolkit (2008), which came through consultation, found a way to allow for responsible disposal - or even sale in exceptional circumstances - while ensuring that decisions are still appropriately researched and considered. Perhaps the ultimate measure that disposal is now viewed as a normal part of collections development is the fact that there are 100 adverts on Find an Object at any one time.

4.4

However, the new situation brings with it risks:

- Disposal is only one part of collections development; museums also need to address acquisition. Of course museums should acquire, but they should think as hard about potential acquisitions as they do about disposal. HLF has amended their grant application process in recent years to place greater emphasis on a museum's public-facing programmes through exhibition or loan of a new acquisition. PAS197, a code of practice for collections management, summarises collections development, information, access and care within a single system. This holistic approach will soon be reflected in the replacement template for acquisition and disposal policy in Accreditation.

- As part of Effective Collections, collections review is about solving problems within an underused collection, where improved knowledge and confidence would allow a museum to increase the public benefit of the material, either in-house or by finding a more appropriate home for it. Collections review must not become a displacement activity that postpones decision-making, or a discrete, back-of-house function; whether reviewing a small part of a collection with subject specialist support, like several Effective Collections projects, or taking a snapshot of a whole collection, like UCL Museums and Collections, it is vital to know what the museum is trying to achieve. At its best, collections review is about giving focus to what a museum can do with its collection. A good collections review is an opportunity to reinvigorate collections development - acquisition, use and disposal - according to the mission of the museum.

- One widely feared risk of taking a more proactive approach to disposal is that it could result in a rise in ill-considered sales. In the four years since the change to the Code of Ethics to allow financially-motivated disposal in exceptional circumstances, there have only been a handful of sales from collections. However, there has been a significant rise in the number of enquiries to the MA by museums considering sale, sometimes because a museum officer has been asked to investigate the collection's potential to raise funds and sometimes as a result of discoveries made during a robust, curatorially-motivated collections review. To support museums in making responsible decisions, the MA will publish Due Diligence Guidelines on sales from collections in 2012, in partnership with ACE's Accreditation team. This will be one of the final publications from Effective Collections.

Ways of working

5

5.1

Over the last five years, Effective Collections has supported over 40 projects run by museums to improve use of collections. It has also brought together a network of people involved in funded projects and has delivered group training in disposal and collections review. A less explicit but nevertheless important aspect of this work has been how Effective Collections has changed ways of working.

5.2

The majority of Effective Collections projects were allocated a coach and more than half of the projects also brought in other forms of external expertise – often in the form of a visiting subject specialist to review a collection (part 4). The use of coaches allowed the MA to fund ambitious proposals at an early stage of development at organisations that had not undertaken projects on a similar scale before. By allocating a coach to a project, the MA could give museums freedom to explore the potential of their project and adapt their plans with confidence that the coach would offer support where needed and keep projects in line with the overall aims of Effective Collections.

This model of working has had a huge impact on the participating organisations, giving individuals working on projects the confidence to undertake challenging tasks such as disposal; to advocate for their projects to colleagues and managers; and to introduce such approaches to other areas of work. Each of these steps has helped to translate working with individuals on relatively small projects into wider organisational change.

5.3

Coaches also gave external credibility to activity within projects. They combined a light-touch monitoring role for the MA with acting as a source of advice. The coaches' task was to support participating museums on projects according to their individual needs, so the role needed to be demand-led and flexible. In that sense, the coaches' role was quite challenging and depended on building up a relationship as a trusted, critical friend. The subtlety of this approach has paid dividends (part 4) and, although employing a coach on a £10,000 project can seem expensive, many would not have succeeded without that kind of support.

5.4

Bringing subject specialists into museums, even for short periods of time, also had appreciable benefits. A written report from an external specialist can back up a museum in the decisions it wishes to make and often has enhanced status in leveraging support from governing bodies and other funders. In the case of Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, the museum's Effective Collections review of its spirit-preserved collection discovered one type specimen and two co-type specimens. This achievement led to a volunteer programme at the museum supported by other external funds. Orkney Museums reviewed its Scapa Flow collection with the specific aim of gaining the knowledge it needed to make decisions, verified by external expertise, about the future of the collection.

5.5

Subject specialist support also inspired interest - even passion - in the museum staff undertaking reviews, from curators to learning staff, front-of-house and volunteers. The Monument Fellowship scheme, also managed by the MA, ran fellowships to bring retired or retiring subject specialists back to museums to share knowledge on a specific collection with successors. A consistent finding from the Monument Fellowships and from the reviews in Effective Collections was that sharing collections knowledge person-to-person with a range of employees can spark engagement with a collection and show that knowledge resides in staff at every level of an organisation. This can invigorate use of the collection when shared with wider audiences.

Bridget Yates, Monument Fellow at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, worked with staff and volunteers from across the organisation to share her knowledge of the museum's historic gardening catalogues. The work led to gardening trainees ordering particular seeds for plants in new displays and the learning team developing a snap game for under-fives to find flowers around the gardens. Robin Hanley of Norfolk Museums said Yates took "collections knowledge beyond the door of the curator's office".

5.6

All projects reported a significant rise in collections knowledge (part 3). While this is not surprising, it does show a strong link between knowledge of a collection, the confidence to use that collection, and a resulting increase in its public impact.





5.7

Effective Collections also brought people working on projects together as a network to share their progress and offer peer support. Network days to inspire and refresh ongoing work were held approximately every six months through the full phase of the programme, with 30 to 40 attendees each time. Feedback was extremely positive from people working on projects, who not only felt a sense of pride in their work, but were able to ask awkward questions and discuss challenges with peers. Some delegates commented that participation in the network had given their project a higher profile at their museum, helping them to communicate it more effectively to colleagues.

The network days also proved to be a light-touch way of monitoring and encouraging projects, enabling coaches and MA staff to identify issues common to several projects and feed the lessons learned through to subsequent MA work. Once again, this approach required central resources to bring people together and maintain the network but, combined with coaching, it offered something much more subtle than formal training and written project reports. Networks have had a clear impact on the success of projects, the development of individuals involved and on host organisations themselves (part 4).

5.8

The willingness of museums to build and maintain relationships with other organisations has increased over the last five years. When the MA began work on Effective Collections, long-term loans were seen as a burden because of the relationship a lender would have to sustain with a borrower. But now that trend has reversed. More national museums are setting up long-term relationships for loans or even partnership galleries with regional museums. One of the key points in NMDC's 2009 report on national-regional partnerships found that "informal relationships and friendships between staff remain a primary way of building collections knowledge and developing partnerships".

Many of the projects funded through Effective Collections relied on partnerships between museums, and an increasing proportion of applications to the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund are submitted by partnerships. This increase in partnership working is likely to come from need, as museums have had to be more creative to attract funding and provide thriving services on reduced budgets. Whatever the cause, real partnership working is a step forward for museums and is encouraging new, innovative ways of working.

5.9

Programmes like Effective Collections and the Monument Fellowships show the benefit that can come from a small amount of resources and a flexible approach. Their impact on ways of working has come from focusing on relationships between people and valuing person-to-person knowledge sharing. Museums now tend to have less money to spend on travel or training and it is tempting to think that online resources can provide the answer. But through Effective Collections, the MA has found that most people in museums are not yet willing to participate online with anything like the commitment they give to face-to-face interaction and that while some online material is very useful, it doesn't give a rounded, developmental experience. Instead, the challenge is to develop a complementary approach to training and museum development that makes the most of online potential alongside the type of coaching and peer support described in this report.

5.10

Funding bodies throughout the UK should use the lessons learned in Effective Collections to influence a more demand-led approach to subject specialist networks (SSNs) in supporting people to care for collections. The work of STICK on Old Tools, New Uses and SHCG on Firstbase (an Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project) demonstrate what SSNs that are task-oriented and outward-looking can achieve. At the time of writing, ACE is yet to publish details of how it will allocate the £150,000 per year committed to SSNs and there is an opportunity to integrate some of the ways of working described here into future plans. Museum development funding can also be better spent by recognising peer networks that can foster knowledge and inspiration in the workforce.

5.11

Likewise, the national museum strategy for Scotland has an opportunity to build a more subtle approach to workforce development into its aims. The national strategy for Wales has committed strongly to sharing collections and specialist knowledge in the form of a distributed national collection. The Welsh Federation of Museums is working to provide online support via a bank of written resources and template documents. CyMAL and the Welsh Federation should consider how they can complement the online resource with a more personal approach that would enhance skills and confidence alongside written knowledge. As the sector moves forward, funders and policy-makers – the MA included – need to be as creative as museums in finding ways to support development.



Right: STICK project, object identification

Innovation and future vision

6

6.1

When Collections for the Future was published in 2005, it put a welcome spotlight back on collections in museums. Inevitably, museum concerns have moved on during - and perhaps because of - the Effective Collections programme. Nevertheless, the work described in this report has put UK museums in a better position to increase public impact, to be more sustainable, to share and work in partnership, and to emerge from a period of financial crisis with some genuinely innovative museums.

6.2

The MA will continue its work on collections through the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. In the first year, 13 proposals have been awarded grants of between £20,000 and £100,000. These include a project to create a West Yorkshire Textile Heritage Trail proposed by Kirklees Museums and Galleries, Calderdale Museums, Wakefield Museums and Bradford Museums and Galleries - an example of museums thinking big and making a real partnership work.

The MA is delighted to continue running the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, and to apply the principles described earlier in this report through grant giving and running the collections network of funded museums. It is hoped that this approach will be an ideal combination of flexibility and support for projects to thrive.

6.3

The MA will also continue building on the learning from Effective Collections through its policy work. The MA has reinforced its commitment to workforce issues to help develop a radical, skilled workforce that reflects the communities it serves. The model of working with catalyst events, peer networks and coaching will feed into the development of this area. The MA will promote the value of nurturing individual champions for change within organisations for the ultimate benefit of the future of the museum sector.

6.4

The MA recently launched a new initiative, Museums 2020. Based on discussion with staff in museums, funders, policy-makers and other stakeholders, the idea is to think afresh about the role of museums, focusing on the impact that museums can have on individuals and communities by 2020. The challenge for museums is to look beyond short-term concerns and normal funding cycles. Museums now more than ever need to think big and reconsider their purpose and impact and Museums 2020 has the potential to help. It can celebrate the growing diversity of the museum sector and bring together the shift in attitudes in museums over the last five years, inspired by the creativity of the UK's leading museums.

6.5

In past reports for Effective Collections, the MA expressed an aim to change the culture of museums to expect to use collections more. This has been no small task in just five years. Part 2 of this report shows that some shifts in thinking have occurred, and part 4 points to a strong legacy for the programme in leaving lasting changes at the organisations that participated. Most would agree that attitudes to disposal have changed enormously in the last five years; that collections reviews have offered a focus and approach embraced by museums; and that appreciation of loans is becoming more widespread. Certainly, museums now have an expectation to achieve greater public impact and to measure their work in such terms. Effective Collections has been a great success, but for that success to translate into real culture change, museums must maintain their expectations to use collections into the years to come.

6.6

The MA's work on collections has been made possible by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The foundation's flexible approach, trust in the MA and long-term commitment has allowed Effective Collections to succeed and continues to support the great work in museums through the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund.

Resources from the programme are available to all museums on the Effective Collections online learning hub:
www.museumsassociation.org/collections.



Part 2:

Comparison of loan and disposal activity across uk museums in 2007 and 2012

Robert Taylor, Elaine Sansom



Introduction

This report was commissioned by the MA to compare the changes in levels of activity and attitudes to long loans and disposals by the UK museum sector since the quantitative benchmark survey of 2007¹.

The 2012 survey includes new questions that explore the sector's awareness of the MA's activity in the area of loans and disposal. A small number of questions from 2007, which helped inform the development of the Effective Collections programme, have not been carried forward into this survey.

Unlike the original survey, where a representative sample of UK museums were invited to contribute, the 2012 survey was confined to those museums that responded in 2007 to enable the data to reflect changes in behaviour and attitudes rather than differences in the organisations responding.

Key points

The comparison of the sector's activity five years apart shows a significant increase in the numbers of museums wanting to dispose of items; a small increase in the number of loans; and an increase in the number of museums wishing to undertake long loans, both lending and borrowing. Considering the challenges facing the sector and the naturally long lead-in times for loans and disposal, this indication of increased activity is encouraging.

The number of museums planning and making disposals will increase as museums reflect the requirements of the Accreditation Standard 2011 and the revised MA Code of Ethics. However, as the report indicates, museums are still finding it difficult to complete their disposals process successfully.

It is anticipated that the study into the impact of the Effective Collections programme will show significant attitudinal change by the sector to long loans and disposal, which will result in more statistically significant activity levels in the foreseeable future. A further survey in five years' time should clearly demonstrate this impact.

¹ Benchmark Study of UK Museum Long Loan and Disposal Activity, 2007. Robert Taylor and Elaine Sansom for the Museums Association.

Disposals

1. Nine tenths of the museums surveyed are aware of the MA's Disposal Toolkit and one third have used it.
2. Over the last three years, many museums have not made any disposals. However the numbers of museums that want to dispose of more items has increased significantly since 2007; nine out of ten museums want to dispose of more.
3. The reason most cited by museums for disposing of items from their collections remains the same; lack of relevance to collecting policy.
4. The majority of museums that dispose use collections review and internal peer review prior to disposal. Just under half of museums use external consultation/peer review, which is comparable to 2007.
5. Four fifths of the museums responding to the disposals questions indicated that they had not disposed of all the items that they planned to, with the main reason being lack of time.

Loans

1. Two thirds of the museums in the 2012 survey are aware of the MA's work on Smarter Loans.
2. All of the museums in the 2012 survey would lend items from their collections. Four fifths are keen to lend more and just over half of those that borrow are keen to borrow more items on long loan. This is comparable to the position in 2007.
3. There has been a reduction in the percentage of museums reporting occasions when requests for long loans have been refused. This may reflect a change in attitude by the sector to long loans.
4. There has been an increase in the numbers of museums taking long loans-in; most were from other museums, with slightly fewer from private owners than in 2007.
5. In 2011 there was an increase in overall loans activity compared to 2006, with a slight decline in requests for long loans.



Museums in the survey

In the 2007 survey, responses were received from 113 museums from throughout the UK. Of these 113 museums, 55 responded to the 2012 survey. They include three national, 21 local authority, five university and 23 independent museums. Three museums classified themselves as “other”, including a charitable trust with collections owned by the local authority and an “arms-length organisation”. All respondents are Accredited.

Although the 2012 survey has a smaller sample size, the returns provide a good range of types and sizes of museum that are broadly in proportion to the makeup of the UK museum sector and reflect the returns of 2007. A good geographic spread between regions and home nations has once again been obtained, with responses from each of the nine regions and three home nations. However the smaller number of responses precludes detailed analysis by museum type, region or nation.

Disposals

Principles and policy

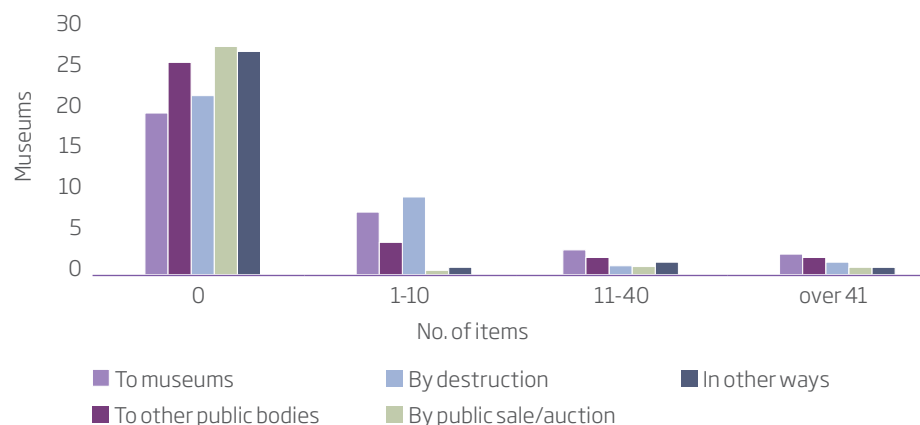
In 2012, 95% of the museums have a collection management policy that includes disposal, although only 64% have ever disposed of items from their collections. In 2007 the figures were comparable at 96% and 62% respectively.

The MA's work to support disposal has had an impact in the sector with 89% of museums being aware of the Disposal Toolkit, and 33% having used it.

Number and destination of disposals

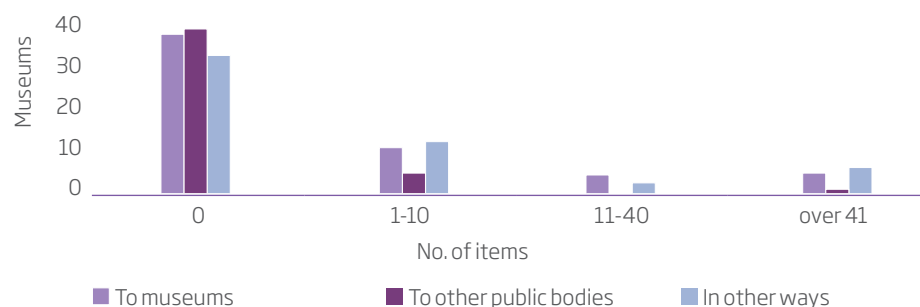
In the 2012 survey, the main routes for disposal of items over the previous three years were by transfer to other museums or by destruction. Disposal to other public bodies mostly involved small numbers of museums with small numbers of items. Disposal through public sale or auction was only undertaken by two or three museums each year. Other disposal methods included: "Sewing machines and hand tools via charities for reuse in Africa"; "objects given to private researchers"; and "return to original donor".

Destination of disposals (average per year 2009-2011)



The majority of museums did not make any disposals in the period 2009 to 2011. However, one or two museums made over 41 disposals in a year.

Destination of disposals (average per year 2004-2006)



The 2007 results were similar, with most museums making no disposals, a few museums making over 41 disposals each year and most disposals either being to other museums or by destruction.

Reasons for disposal

In 2012, the two main reasons given by respondents for disposing of items were lack of relevance to the collecting policy (81%) and the condition of the object (72%). Space and cost of storage was only cited by a third of respondents. The 2007 results were similar. In both surveys, of the three main reasons for disposal, it is “space and storage costs” that museums anticipate using significantly more in future.

Peer review or external consultation prior to disposal

In 2012, 42% of those responding carried out a collections review and external peer review, whilst 84% had a collections review with an internal peer review and 10% consulted with the public. The 2007 figures were comparable with 46% of museums that had disposed of items using external consultation/peer review prior to disposals.

Barriers to disposal

In 2012, 83% of respondents to the disposal questions indicated that they had not disposed of all the items that they had planned to, with the main reason cited being lack of time. Lack of suitable documentation or clear ownership was the second most cited barrier, followed by not being able to find a suitable organisation to receive the items. It is noticeable that in 2012, only 10% of museums cited lack of confidence to carry out the disposal process as a barrier. Other barriers cited were: “Not ready to undertake disposal”; “further work on reviewing the collections required”; and “delays in approval from the governing body”. Some museum-specific barriers were cited: “Strong local public opposition to disposal of specific items”; and “US regulations (including ITAR) prevent us disposing of some items”.

In 2007 the perceived complexity and time required to undertake the disposal process was cited as a reason for the low numbers of items actually being removed from collections. The work of the MA in this area may have helped museums tackle the complexity of the process with more confidence, although the amount of time disposal activity takes is still a significant problem.

Interest in disposal

In 2012, 91% of the museums want to dispose of more items from their collections and this is an increase on the 76% of museums in the 2007 survey. Of note is the fact that 18% of the 2012 sample anticipate making disposals in the following year, while 29% want to make disposals within the next three years. Both groups have disposals higher on their agenda than the 44% of museums that want to make disposals at some unspecified time in the future. Only 9% of the museums do not want to dispose of more items from the collection, compared with 24% in 2007, illustrating a substantial change in attitude towards disposal as part of responsible collections management.

Loans

Principles and policy

All of the museums in the 2012 survey would lend items from their collections and 83% are keen to lend more. This is comparable to the position in 2007 when 96% would lend items and 84% were keen to lend more, as the museums that did not lend in 2007 have not responded in 2012.

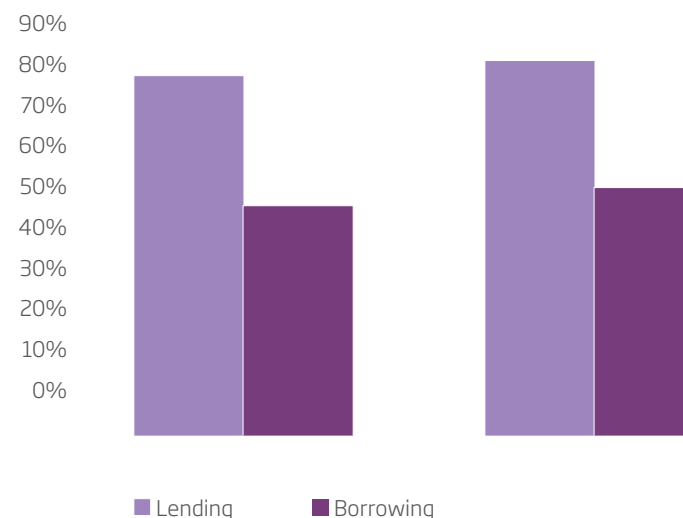
Acknowledging the limitations of the sample size, it is possible to see some change in attitude towards lending more items. Independent museums are now relatively more interested than other museum types. In 2012, 96% of independent museums were interested in lending more compared with 75% of local authority, 80% of university and 33% of national museums. Whereas in 2007 there was a similar level of interest from all types of museums: 87% independents, 82% local authority, and 88% university and national museums.

Compared with the 100% of museums that would lend from their collections in 2012, only 95% would borrow items. This translates as one local authority, one university and one “other” museum that do not borrow items. This five percentage point difference between lending and borrowing was also present in 2007, when 96% of museums would lend and 91% would borrow.

By 2012, of the museums that have borrowed items, 53% would be keen to borrow more on long loan, which is comparable with the 56% in 2007. There is no statistically significant variance in the types of museums wanting more long loans-in compared with 2007.

Museums are aware of developments in the sector’s approach to loans over the last five years, with 65% being aware of the MA’s work on Smarter Loans.

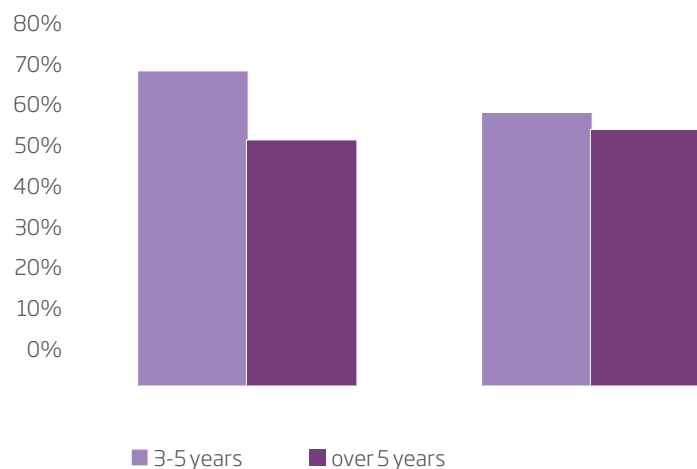
Museums interested in more loans



Long loans-out

The percentage of museums with three- to five-year loans-out has increased slightly to 71% (up from 62% in 2007), with the number having loans-out for over five years remaining the same at 56%. This may show the impact of the Effective Collections programme in encouraging museums to consider making more long loans. It may also reflect museum and gallery refurbishment activities during the period, with long loans filling gaps in a museum's collection.

Museums with long loans-out

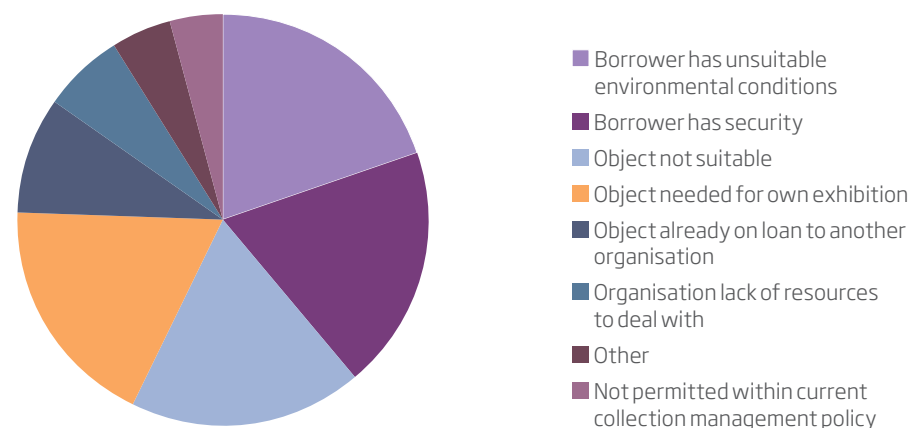


Refusing long loan requests

In the 2012 survey 69% of museums reported that there had been occasions when requests to make loans for long periods had been refused, compared with 79% in 2007. This may reflect a change in attitude by the sector to long loans. The main reasons for refusal are similar to those given in 2007, with the potential borrower having unsuitable environmental conditions or security.

There has, however, been a reduction in the percentage of museums citing as a barrier the capacity of the museum to deal with requests; in 2012 only 24% cited capacity compared with 32% in 2007. In the current environment, this is more likely to reflect a change in attitude towards loans (i.e. they are manageable) rather than an increase in capacity. Organisational capacity should not, however, be underestimated as a factor for some museums, as the following 2012 comment illustrates: "Long loans are avoided (but still permitted on occasions) due to turnover of curatorial staff and therefore the ability to deal with and keep track of long loans."

Number of museums in 2012 citing reason for refusing long-loan request



Long loans-in

There has been an increase in the numbers of museums with long loans-in, with 71% having loans-in for three to five years and 79% having loans-in for over five years, compared with 55% and 74% respectively in 2007. Most of the loans for over three years in 2012 were from other museums, with slightly fewer loans from private owners than in 2007.

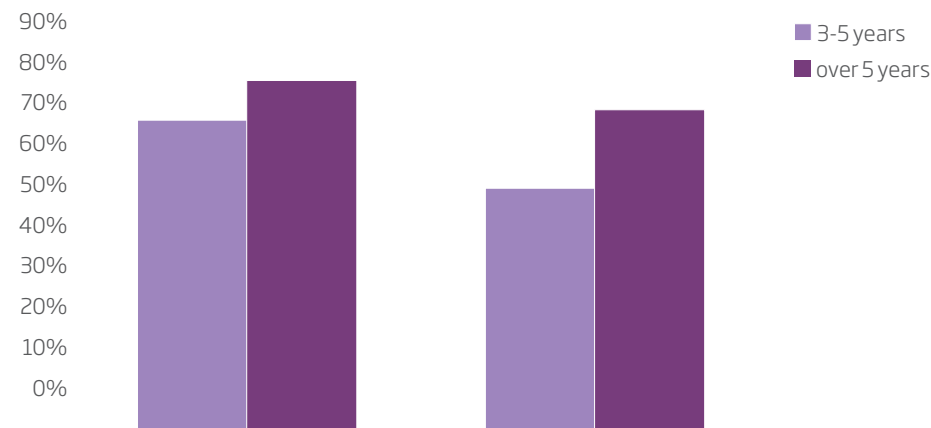
Many museums still have large numbers of items loaned to them for five years or more; 33% in 2012 had more than 41 items on loan compared with 42% in 2007. Apart from long loans for permanent exhibitions, it is likely that many of these could be termed "legacy" loans, where there is either a lack of documentation to confirm that the item is a donation or the loan was set up many years ago and the records are not adequate to determine the current owner or status. During the survey in 2007, a number of museums indicated they were keen to tackle their "legacy" loans and the reduction in this large number of items loaned-in may indicate that progress is being made.

Loans activity in 2011 and 2006

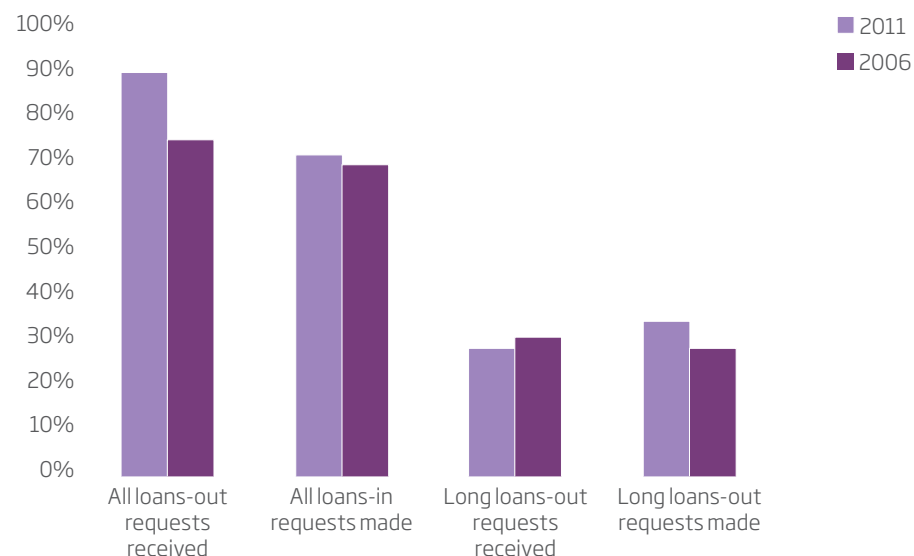
Museums were asked to identify actual levels of loans activity in the previous year. In both 2011 and 2006, most of the loans requested from museums were for short periods and involved requests that ranged in number from one or two items to over 41 items. In 2011 the numbers of museums receiving requests for loans had increased to 91% from 76% in 2006; however the number of museums receiving requests for long loans over three years had slightly declined, with 28% in 2011 compared with 33% in 2006. This may not be indicative of a trend as museums are still very interested in making more loans from their collections. In the same period there has been a small increase in the numbers of museums making requests to borrow items for over three years; 35% in 2011 compared to 28% in 2006.

As with loans-out activity, the bulk of loans-in activity in 2011 and 2006 was short-term and likely to be related to temporary exhibitions.

Museums with long loans-in



Museums loans activity over one year



Part 3:

Change in attitudes among museums participating in Effective Collections



Gina Evans



Introduction

All of the participants involved in the Effective Collections programme were asked to complete an initial evaluation questionnaire surveying both individual and organisational knowledge of the collection, level of usage and general attitudes towards collections and their uses. All participants were then asked to complete the same questionnaire at the end of their projects.

Respondents were asked to comment on a number of statements rating their level of knowledge, usage and confidence as well as agreement with statements using a scale of 1-10. All questions related to knowledge and usage of collections asked respondents to answer in relation only to the collection that had been the subject of their Effective Collections grant.

30 out of 34 projects completed the initial evaluation forms and 16 out of 34 projects have returned their final evaluation forms.

Knowledge and use of the collection

"The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Effective Collections project has enabled us to vastly improve our knowledge and documentation of objects stored in three main storage areas."

Rosalyn Smith, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

All respondents reported that they believed their organisation's knowledge of the collection had increased from a moderate (5) to a good level (7). A slightly larger increase was seen when asked about their individual knowledge of the collection, with respondents on average rating their knowledge at the end of the project as very good (8) compared to a moderate (5) knowledge at the beginning of the project.

When asked about the current level of usage of their collection responses show that this had increased to a lesser extent going from a low (4) to moderate (6) level of usage. This may well reflect the stage that many Effective Collections projects had reached at the time of the final evaluation; all projects had completed collections reviews but some are still to fully implement the new knowledge gained to increase use of collections.

Partnerships

There was an increase in current levels of partnership working, with respondents indicating that this had gone from a low (4) to good (7) level. This is a positive outcome for the Effective Collections programme, which prioritised the importance of partnership working from the outset. (More in-depth examples of partnership working can be found in part 3 of this report.)

"The project is likely to have positive effects on our organisation in a number of ways. The increased audience is the most obvious, but the new working partnerships with local museums are also useful for future projects."
Lee Ismail, Booth Museum of Natural History



Right: Booth Museum of Natural History

Confidence in tackling disposals, lending and borrowing

All respondents stated that there had been an increase in confidence when tackling disposal, both in the individuals and their organisations. Overall, responses showed that, on average, organisations' confidence had increased from a moderate (6) to a good (7) level and individuals' confidence had increased slightly more from moderate (6) to good (8).

There was a similar increase in confidence when dealing with lending and borrowing. Respondents believed that their organisations' confidence had risen from good (7) to very good (9) and that individual confidence had remained good, increasing from a rating of 7 to 8.

This shows that those participating in the Effective Collections project were self-selecting and that those who put themselves forward and decided to apply were already relatively confident and competent in managing disposal and loans. The projects have increased their confidence, giving them the opportunity to focus their skills on areas like collections management.

Attitudes to collections

In the final section of the survey, respondents were asked to comment on their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

Collections should be viewed as distributed collections that are shared

Exhibiting or using an object outside the walls of a museum is as valuable to the organisation as within

Items in a collection have differing value

Collections are for audiences

Collections need to be smaller.

There was little change in responses to these statements. All respondents either agreed (8) or strongly agreed (9) with the first four statements at the both the initial and final stage of evaluation. Respondents only moderately agreed with the final statement, “collections need to be smaller”, in both initial and final evaluations. This statement proved more difficult for people to rate as many commented that it depended on the collection in question and were reluctant to agree or disagree.

This small change in attitude is arguably attributed to the fact that the individuals who successfully applied to the Effective Collections programme were sympathetic to its aims from the outset. It is, however, reassuring to see that participation in the programme has served to confirm their opinions towards the management and use of collections.

How the project has met the Effective Collections grant criteria

The form asked respondents to summarise in 300 words how their project had enabled them to fulfil the Effective Collections grant criteria of:

- improved use of stored collections for demonstrable public outcomes
- impact on the museum
- sustainability and legacy beyond the period of the project
- value for money.

These responses are covered in more detail in part 4 of this report.



Part 4:

Key learning from Effective Collections



Finbar Lillis

Introduction

This strand of the MA evaluation of Effective Collections gathered information from the 34 projects¹ about what they learned from their experiences and the effectiveness of the projects overall.

The evaluation included:

1. Desk analysis of all relevant Effective Collections programme documentation, including collections data; case studies; range statements; self- and coach/mentor-conducted evaluations; any supporting project documentation available, including planning/strategy documents; and any other relevant data supplied by the MA Effective Collections team²
2. An online survey of museum project staff
3. An online survey of MA coaches/mentors
4. Video interviews with staff from six selected projects; notes of meetings
5. Notes from face-to-face/Skype discussions, mail and telephone exchanges with the MA team.



There were 33 responses to the staff survey and five responses to the coach/mentor survey. Responses to the two surveys informed the evaluation process and reports, and enabled learning outcomes and impacts to be identified. Key themes emerging from this research are also explored in the Effective Collections online learning hub, www.museumsassociation.org/collections.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a comprehensive list of Effective Collections projects and grants

² Background documents included: *Collections for the Future*, MA 2005
Taylor R., Sansom E., *Benchmark Study of UK Museum Long Loan and Disposal Activity*, MA July 2007
Code of Ethics for Museums, MA 2008
Disposal Toolkit - Guidelines for museums, MA 2008
Effective Collections programme prospectus 2009-12, MA 2009
Smarter Loans - Principles for lending and borrowing from UK museums, MA February 2012

Key findings

Purposeful collections reviews:

Projects that began with a collections review have seen strategic changes and, in some cases, wholesale review of all policies.

Improvements in collections policy and practice:

These included better knowledge of collections; better organisation and storage; improved documentation; revised collections policies; and positive use of external expertise. These improvements supported and validated changes, leading to:

Extension of practice to other collections:

Good practice habits were discovered and carried forward. Effective Collections projects enabled museum staff to see a way forward in dealing with other areas of their museums' collections.

Positive impact on the museum offer:

Projects have resulted in new galleries being opened, more of the collections being put on display, learning reviews, and the creation of new temporary exhibitions with significant visitor numbers. Through conservation assessment, methodologies have been developed for future use of collections, breaking down barriers to use and revealing potential for collections to attract new audiences.

Public engagement: Projects have used new ways of engaging the public that go beyond traditional exhibitions, including the involvement of audiences in reviewing and enhancing collections – whether through selection and conservation activities, adding objects or helping to interpret items and update records.

Partnerships: Many of those created for Effective Collections projects will continue. Museums partnered in a variety of ways (geographically and/or through shared interests) to share subject specialist expertise and develop joint approaches to collections policy and practice. Loans from collections have been made to partner museums, often enhanced by contextual material and sharing of knowledge and skills.

Additional funding: Projects levered in grants and resources-in-kind, a welcome counterbalance to the experiences of closure, redundancy and funding cuts.

Increased confidence: Respondents felt more confident in dealing with collections and finding new ways to create partnerships and engage with the public.

Learning something new and applying what was learned: Successful projects were ones where staff learned something new. This included learning about how to manage collections; the process of collections review and how to get the best from experts; how to validate decisions about collections with and without external expert help; how to set in train long-term plans for reviewing other collections within the museum; how to work with museum partners and other organisations for mutual benefit; how to engage with the community; how to recruit and keep volunteers; how to engage management and articulate the strategic value of the project; how to dispose of objects ethically and with confidence.

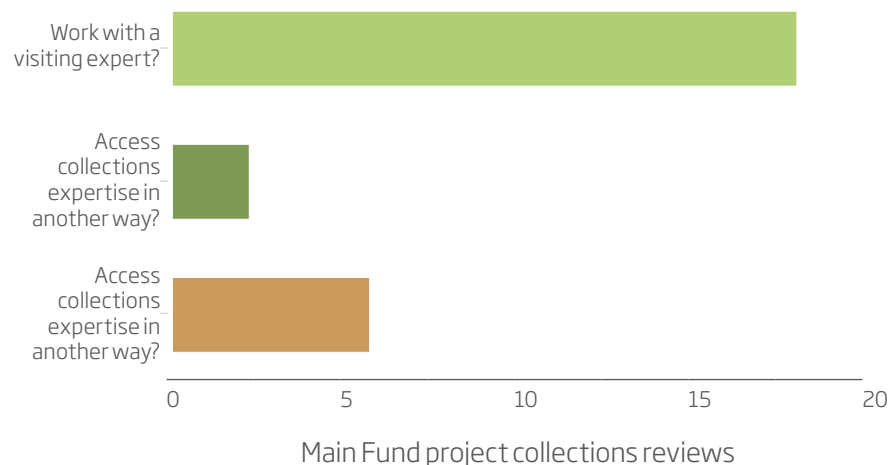
Project activities: what they did

1

1.1 Collections review: bringing in the experts

18 of the 26 Main Fund projects that conducted a collections review paid for external experts to support and/or undertake all or part of the collections review. Voluntary expert involvement is explored in section 1.3 below.

For your Collection Review, did you:



Experts worked with staff to review collections. As well as helping to select, catalogue and interpret items in the chosen collection, experts also deepened knowledge of collections and brought new approaches to understanding objects.

Bringing in external expertise, whether paid or voluntary, helped museums to:

- access expertise in other museums and discover new ways of working
- network with other curators and share skills
- instil the confidence to interpret and make better use of the collection
- validate decisions and actions taken.

“The value of these experts has been life-changing for the collection. Their input has given us the chance to learn a lot about our collection and the reports generated will be put to good use in supporting future development of the collection.”

Janette Park, Orkney Arts, Museums and Heritage

Although there were some difficulties in working with experts (for example, trying to find the right expert often caused delays), projects made very good use of their contribution. In the best cases there has been a lasting legacy for the museum resulting directly from expert input. The effect of having a fresh pair of eyes and the inexorability of the process – once started, reviews had to be completed – helped to drive many projects along. Where the museum was proactive in using the expert’s input as the first step in a wholesale review of collections policy, experts validated new approaches to reviewing collections as well as underwriting the museum’s decisions about the objects themselves.

Museums that made most effective use of external experts:

- were clear from the outset about what they wanted the expert to do
- approached and recruited experts methodically and efficiently
- agreed a methodology for the review process and analysed its effectiveness
- ensured the expert worked with specific museum staff in the review
- generated guidance with or for the expert and staff to use and reviewed its effectiveness
- either used an existing documentation process or tested a new approach
- asked the expert to produce a specialist guidance document to the reviewed collection for future use

- reviewed/created collections policy and strategy with input from the expert
- sought recommendations/validation from the expert for decisions on the collection
- integrated reports on the progress of the review into internal monitoring systems
- transferred learning into a plan for involving experts in reviewing other parts of the collection.

1.2 Collections review: building in-house capacity in the museum

Not all museums brought in external experts. Some conducted the review in-house to improve the museum's knowledge of its own collection, allow new staff to get to know the collection and improve internal working relationships and recording systems. MA coach support was important for managing and validating this approach.

"We conducted our collections review in-house with support from our director and MA mentor. We chose to do this to enable our education department and curatorial staff to focus on the collection and its potential together to establish a new way of joint working; act as a collections information exchange between members of staff; act as an in-house vehicle for collections learning; and test our collections management system."

Alison Shepherd, National Mining Museum of Scotland

In one case it was acknowledged that if the museum had used expert input it may have improved understanding of the collection reviewed and the quality of records kept:

"[Working in-house] allowed us to complete a large collections review in a short space of time but may have resulted in less full documentation and less understanding of the significance of the collections than if we had worked with a specialist."

Anja Rohde, Derby Museum and Art Gallery



Right: *Down the Back of the Sofa* by Derby Museums Service for the Vintage Festival 2011

1.3 Partnerships

68% of participants worked on their project in non-funded partnerships with other museums and a wide range of other organisations. Partnerships were either geographically-based or based on a subject specialism. Some ongoing working relationships were formed as a result.

Four museums made their applications in formal partnerships with other museums. For example, NMS acted as lead partner for the project Old Tools, New Uses, in partnership with STICK.

A wide range of non-museum organisations were involved in partnerships, including schools, libraries, theatre companies, the National Trust, Wessex Sound and Film Archive and Plymouth University Marine Biological Association, to name just a few.

This diversity reflects the scope of Effective Collections projects. The partnerships focused on accessing and sharing expertise and spreading the benefits of the project to organisations with a mutual interest in realising its goals.

The benefits of partnership from working with other museums:

- helped to clarify museums' mutual aims and roles
- enabled access and interpretation of objects on loan
- developed learning resources
- improved mutual reach.

At local, regional and national levels, projects developed a practical understanding of how to manage and use a distributed collection. The Special Project in Wales had the ambitious aim of coordinating collections of contemporary material in museums across the nation.

"We also worked with other museums in Wales [beyond the project consortia] in an inclusive way as we feel this can contribute to the concept of a distributed national collection as part of the museum strategy for Wales, so all museums needed to be aware."
John Marjoram, consortium of national and local museums in Wales

The benefits of partnership from working with other organisations in the community:

- extended museums' reach and understanding of people within their community
- accessed individual volunteer subject experts through partners
- accessed specialist resources needed to complete the collections review
- provided access to network of contacts and volunteers
- explored new territory.

"We did not involve another museum but we did involve a motor vehicle enthusiast who helped identify objects for which we had no documentation or provenance. We then based our disposals review on their expert knowledge."

Steve Bagley, Coventry Transport Museum

Projects benefited greatly from partnerships. Expertise and resources were provided and shared where needed. Partners were able to develop strategically important relationships, while the project provided a vehicle for testing out and growing partnerships though tackling the practical requirements of a collections review. No participants reported significant problems in managing their partnership other than the usual constraints of working across organisations.

There were lasting benefits for some museums, whose understanding and capacity to reach different parts of the community was enhanced by working with experts who could steer them.

1.4 Giving communities a stake in collections

Some museums are positioned, in every sense, to engage continuously with their local community.

“Orkney is very community orientated and Scapa Flow Visitor Centre and Museum is on the island of Hoy - there is a strong feeling of ownership and we work closely with the community the whole time.”

Janette Park, Orkney Arts, Museums and Heritage

Others have to work harder to reach people in their community, while some specialist museums have a widely scattered constituency. Either way, the majority of Effective Collections projects had some form of improved community engagement as one of their objectives. Most participants believed that a better understood and organised collection would improve accessibility and, from the outset, many projects focused on making the collection more useable by the public.

Right: Display case at Horsham Museum as part of the project coordinated by the Booth Museum of Natural History



1.5 Involving communities in collections review

Some museums involved the community in the process of reviewing collections, using expertise from the public to interpret and better understand the collection and giving local people, enthusiasts and expert groups a sense of ownership over it.

The National Mining Museum of Scotland (NMMS) recognised that many day-to-day objects held in its collection held powerful associations for the older mining community but had become inaccessible to them.

"We had for years realised our older mining community were finding it harder and harder to get into the museum and access the collection, and through our contact with donors, visitors and community groups, we understood fully the deep meaning the objects in our collection hold for the community."

Alison Shepherd, National Mining Museum Scotland

This understanding influenced the review process. Alongside an overall review of the collection, the museum selected objects for new loans boxes. Community members identified items that were missing from the collection (or too few in number to lend) and, after putting the word out, people came forward to donate additional items.

"We wanted our project to get those objects back into their hands at a time in their lives when they most need them... I think it has worked because we listened to our communities, observed what was happening in our museum and tailor-made the project to fill that need."

Alison Shepherd, National Mining Museum of Scotland



This process of involving the community in the review has built a continuing relationship with organisations and professionals working with older members of the community. NMMS now works with them on an ongoing basis to develop further resources intended to make the collections more accessible, saying: "We've only just started."

Not all collections have an immediate and wide appeal, but there are ways to broaden that appeal. Involving people imaginatively in the collections review improved understanding of the botanical collection at Leeds Museums and Galleries. The project looked at plants collected 100 years ago and then revisited the same sites to see what had changed in the habitats and land use. The museum achieved this through fieldwork with local community groups and schools.

"[This was] very successful - teaching them real ecological and botanical techniques, learning about wildlife and what grows in urban locations, accessioning of material into the collection."

Camilla Nichol, Leeds Museums and Galleries

The project was a real scientific investigation, not a mock-up, and the community updated and added to the museum's collection. It provided a real learning opportunity for all involved.

Above: One of the loan boxes created by NMMS

1.6 Interactive exhibitions and events

A number of participants held exhibitions and many objects were displayed for the first time as a result of the projects. Some involved the public in designing exhibitions, while others staged events to draw people in and keep them involved, testing out new approaches to interpretation and gathering responses to objects that could be collated and used to inform the collection.

"We empowered local students to curate their own exhibition, facilitated reminiscence sessions and encouraged young people to create their vision of Slough's future by engaging with its past."

Eleanor Pulfer, Slough Museum

1.7 Informal learning

A huge volume of informal learning took place across Effective Collections projects and could be valuable to practitioners and their museums in the future. Shared recognition of the value of this informal learning would help to reinforce its worth to the sector.

Many respondents emphasised that what they had learned was transferable and that they would use their new knowledge and skills to extend their review of collections at their own museum and or within their partnership. Gaining new specialist knowledge had a value in itself but, perhaps as importantly, showed curators that it was possible to acquire knowledge outside of their own discipline and use it in their work.

There is clear evidence that both the specialist knowledge and the transferable knowledge and skills acquired by project staff gave them the confidence to take work further, and many had already started doing so.

Some common examples of informal learning gains cited by project staff were:

- project planning and management skills
- managing all aspects of a collections review
- specialist collections knowledge and skills
- working with people
- working in partnerships beyond the museum.

"Building a team outside the museum with a common goal has made the museum more visible and its resources more accessible. The external organisations bring us a wealth of specialist knowledge."

Alison Shepherd, National Mining Museum Scotland



Right: National Mining
Museum Scotland

1.8 Which ways of learning worked best?

The most highly valued learning was practical, hands-on and needs-driven, and often came from other museum colleagues. Project staff learned from their own colleagues, coaches and experts, other museums, partner organisations, museum users, MA training days, peers at cohort meetings and a wide range of people from the community.

Shrinking budgets and fewer staff have obliged museums to abandon departmental silos. Some projects were set up for this to happen, with curatorial staff learning from technicians and administrative staff, and specialist collections staff working with education departments.

Learning from specialist experts was universal, as numerous references in this report attest, but project staff acquired analytical skills as well as factual knowledge from experts.

"They learnt much more than dates and identifications, but were shown how to look at the construction of pieces and what woods had been used, so that they have carried away skills and knowledge that they will be able to apply in the future."

Pam Judkins, Wakefield Council, Arts and Museums

1.9 Pass it on: knowledge transfer in and out of the museum

Trustees or steering group members need to know what learning has been acquired and what implications it might have for the museum. Only two participants claimed that their project simply enabled them to undertake work they planned to do already but could not afford; almost all said that their Effective Collections work had a much wider impact on new learning. For this to last, staff, volunteers, managers and trustees need to think about the implications and act to ensure the learning is not lost.

Knowledge was transferred through:

- formal routes
- articles, conference inputs, bulletins and newsletters
- informal exchanges and drop-ins
- online networks and blogs, both internal and external
- planned sessions for staff and volunteers.

"Learning from the project continues to feed into project planning meetings and into discussions regarding future development of our interpretation strategy, with practice explored through Effective Collections providing helpful pilot examples."

Miranda Steam, Orleans House Gallery

"Councillors voted to save the steam crane due to the information provided in the Effective Collection reports."

Janette Park, Orkney Arts, Museums and Heritage

A pre-planned approach to knowledge transfer helps to ensure that people who are only peripherally involved in the project (or not at all) take it seriously and consider its impact for the organisation. This helps to build confidence among project staff and break down territorial boundaries between departments. It can also reduce conflict by sharing the gains made by the project across the organisation, with direct tangible benefits for the collection.

1.10 Innovation

The five Special Projects were expected to demonstrate innovation and ambition as exemplars for the sector. The project survey asked every participant if they felt they had innovated in exemplary ways and 22 responded, including all five Special Project participants.

Examples of innovation and exemplary practice include:

- Derby Museum working in partnership with its library service to get collections into community venues and involve community groups in the selection and interpretation of objects
- New Art Gallery Walsall integrating contemporary art and archive material in informative and engaging ways for visitors

- meaningful reuse of disposal objects in Old Tools, New Uses. Jilly Burns at NMS said:

“The disposals to the partners’ charities, in particular the disposal of items to Tools for Self Reliance and reuse in Tanzania and Sierra Leone, is a great exemplar. Over 40 museums in Scotland coming together with £25,000 to produce a catalogue of what they have, a resource for future curators to use to develop these collections [and] rationalisation amounting to around 80 disposals to charitable purpose, is pretty good delivery with a small budget.”

- the contemporary collecting project in Wales producing a touring exhibition to engage the public on issues around collecting and seek their comment, as well as linking this work to actions within the national museum strategy for Wales
- Herbert Art Gallery and Museum using conservation assessment to investigate new ways of using costume collection in handling and teaching as well as display
- Slough Museum working with Langley Academy students to create “mini-museums” that travel around the school.

For many respondents, running an Effective Collections project was innovative and ambitious in itself. If the projects’ achievements can be emulated more widely by the sector, and if the MA can facilitate this, the Effective Collections programme as a whole will be judged to have had a lasting significant impact on the way museums think about collections.



Right: STICK project, object identification

Impact of Effective Collections projects on professional practice

2

Almost all respondents signalled that there will be a lasting impact on personal professional practice as a result of Effective Collections. As a direct result of the projects, changes in working practice and policy were either already in train or planned in almost all respondents' museums.

2.1 Peer learning

Respondents expressed an increased confidence and willingness to share what has been learned, both internally and with other museums. One of the lasting legacies of Effective Collections projects could be the purposeful facilitation of learning exchanges between individuals and organisations. The MA's Effective Collections online learning hub is intended to be used for this purpose.

"Reorganising the collection myself has provided me with skills in marine zoology and an increased knowledge of the collection as a whole... It has also provided me with the expertise to support other colleagues in the museum, and in other museums who would like to carry out collections reviews."

Jan Freedman, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery





2.2 Applying what was learned to ongoing work

Many projects are effectively “ongoing”, meaning that participants intend to apply what they have learned to reviewing other parts of their collections, and to use their increased experience of project-working more widely in other areas of activity. Respondents reported a better understanding of managing partnerships; structuring and planning projects; and learning to take a broader view about how their work contributes to the museum.

Given the strictures now being faced by museums, agile thinking and proactive attitudes to collaboration will be essential if they are to stay in control of their own futures. Effective Collections projects have taught many museum staff important lessons in these ways of working.

“I personally discovered how important it is when working with other external partners to get their commitment firmly sorted out in advance, so that everyone knows what they were working towards, and to avoid hours of wasted work when changes are made.”

Lee Ismail, Booth Museum of Natural History

“This project has provided a springboard for the next stage with the Epstein Archive and will contribute to a great deal of future internal and external research.”

Neil Lebeter, The New Art Gallery Walsall

“We have built up research files relating to the history of film and of associated Scottish histories, from cinema circuits and picture houses to film production units, notable film makers, cinema employees and cine societies... We hope to become a hub for Scottish cinema collections by end 2013.”

Jenny Noble, North Lanarkshire Museum Service

2.3 Legacy: next steps and lasting changes for museums

The Effective Collections experience has been a call to action. The vast majority of participants are transferring what was learned from their project to the whole museum. Above all, there is a strong sense that the projects gave museums the confidence to become much more proactive in managing collections.

"This store was used as a model for other stores in the museum. I have developed a 'disposal proposal form' for the museum which can be used for any collections and must be passed to the city curator for approval."

Jan Freedman, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

"There is now a dedicated team in the organisation named 'effective collections' using the ideas from our projects and the MA to apply to the other collections."

Lee Ismail, Booth Museum of Natural History

Effective Collections projects have generated evidence needed to substantiate funding proposals and clarified the strategic direction and priorities for museums and their collections. This varies in scale from Orkney Museums securing council support for work on a steam crane in the collection, to York Museums Trust including their project in ACE Major Grant funding:

"We built into the funding application a continuation of the Pocket Money project and a post of curator of numismatics - both these elements of the projects were successful. So as a direct result of the MA Effective Collections grant we will have a lovely new post and an exciting project."

Andrew Morrison, York Museums Trust

Effective Collections projects (2009-12) operated through the worst financial crisis known in modern times. Yet almost all museums involved stayed enthusiastic and proactive throughout. Six out of 23 respondents said there were no obstacles to future changes resulting from their Effective Collections project being implemented in their museum. However, 17 cited potential problems.

"[We are] at the whim of local councillors and funding. In addition to obvious impact on staffing levels if funding is reduced... it can be hard to get certain councillors to appreciate the project. Even with advocacy, there is a residual view that the collections are OURS and therefore [they] may have a tendency to block disposals and resist the permanent loaning of material."

Anonymous

Uncertainty as to the future status of museums in transition to trust status was also cited as an issue, but there was hope that moving to trust would allow museums to act imaginatively and use their own informed common sense.

But the achievements made - especially those that led to strategic change, better community engagement and a sense of gaining control over their collections - no doubt helped museums through very difficult times.

"Effective Collections validated the work that was vital to build a sustainable organisation in terms of its collections management. Instead of this being seen to be personal whims of the director and myself, we were able to show that we were acting in accordance with national best practice. This has been crucial to our organisation's development."

Donna Steele, Ditchling Museum



Above: Spirit preserved specimens before (left) and after conservation, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

Project planning and monitoring

3

3.1 Coaching and mentoring

Five experienced coaches were appointed by the MA and allocated to each of the Main Fund projects. The majority of coaching time was paid for out of the projects' £10,000 funding. Special Projects were not allocated a coach in the same way but were able to access the support and advice of a mentor where necessary.

Coaches were expected to:

- work with the museum(s) from the start of the project to set objectives and outcomes
- act as a sounding board for ideas
- be a source of advice and/or contacts
- help the museum(s) to embed new approaches/practice in the culture of the organisations involved

- disseminate learning from the project
- motivate and chase progress on the project
- contribute to the evaluation of different aspects of Effective Collections, including each project and the role of the coach.

Main Fund project respondents said they had spent an average of just under three days each working face-to-face with their coach and one and a half days communicating via Skype, email and telephone. 21 out of 23 responding said their coach had assisted in the production of their workplan. Coaches offered support at key stages in the project, as well as being informally available when needed.

They kept projects on track; with competing demands and, in many cases, major internal changes taking place concurrently, coaches helped participants to focus and maintain momentum.

Coaches specifically supported:

- project planning
- reviewing collections
- loans activity
- responsible disposal
- direction at key stages of the project.

The five MA Coaches also acted as mentors on the Special Projects. The role of mentor was more hands-off than that of coach. Mentors needed to be available for support but did not play an active role in the delivery of Special Project objectives. Where mentor support was accessed, participants judged it to be useful.

The majority of participants that said they valued input from the coach perhaps gained more from the experience than they were expecting.

Not all respondents felt that they needed a coach. One said: "Although very nice and very helpful, we really didn't need [the coach's] intervention. Being compelled to have this contact time and to have to pay for it from the £10,000 should have been optional. We have lots of project management experience."

3.2 How the project was managed: using the Logic Model and Workplan

The MA asked all projects to complete a Logic Model and Workplan (with the support of the coach or mentor if needed). This was used successfully as a project planning and management tool by almost all respondents and was generally integrated into existing work management practices.

The Logic Model and Workplan helped to:

- keep ambitions in check
- stay on track
- agree actions and deadline
- monitor progress
- achieve concrete outcomes
- keep the project on track when responsibility passes from one person to another
- organise workflows and allocate tasks
- manage partners' actions and deadlines
- identify dependencies and risks.

"Creating the workplan helped to crystallise the results of the review into actual actions to produce improved outcomes for our stored collections."
Pam Judkins, Wakefield Council, Arts and Museums

3.3 Monitoring project progress

In addition to charting progress using the Logic Model and Workplan, progress was monitored in detail by many participants, producing information that was useful, and sometimes essential, for future planning. The monitoring of progress helped projects to operate more smoothly and to identify obstacles and potential risks. Feeding progress reports up the line helped to maintain the profile of the project with managers, steering group members, trustees and partners.

3.4 MA cohort/network meetings

Although not regarded as a formal part of the monitoring process, the cohort meetings organised by the MA were useful points of contact and reference for many projects. The meetings provided opportunities to gather feedback to inform development and were particularly supportive for people working alone.

"[The cohort days provided] not just links with colleagues and a forum for interchange of ideas, but also a real 'feel good' atmosphere and support for curators often working in fairly isolated professional circumstances."
Pam Judkins, Wakefield Council, Arts and Museums

Not all projects could attend the cohort meetings and some cited distance from London and costs as a key issue.

All respondents that attended were enthusiastic about the MA cohort meetings and welcomed the chance to meet other practitioners focused on similar tasks. These meetings were informal learning exchanges and will be missed by staff, particularly isolated practitioners, unable to find resources to travel to and stay in London.

3.5 Value for money: capitalising on Effective Collections project funds

All respondents thought they had obtained “good value for money” from their grant allocation, and many secured additional funding. How they spent project funds varied quite widely, reflecting the different aims of projects and their internal requirements.

In general, Main Fund projects spent most of their funds on expert input, project staff, coaches and conservation. There are exceptions: one participant allocated 75% of funds to display and another allocated 40% to the development of related events, interactive equipment, touring exhibits and learning resources.

Special Project respondents spent an average of 60% on external fees, including specialist input and project staff brought in to undertake key tasks.

Participants were asked if they would allocate project funds differently in hindsight. Out of 17 replies, all said they were generally happy with how funds had been allocated.

3.6 Additional funds and resourcing

Effective Collections project funding was supplemented by allocation of resources already secured; resources-in-kind in the form of additional staff time and expertise; and extensive volunteer time, involvement and expertise. Projects were encouraged to apply for additional external funding and a number were successful.

11 museums applied for other external funds and/or used other additional resources to support the project. One secured £23,000 from Renaissance in the Regions to assist with the conservation of its spirit-preserved specimens. This grant went towards materials, paying a part-time member of staff to supervise volunteers and commissioning a freelance conservator.

Some museums had already secured project funding or allocated internal resources to ensure the Effective Collections project was viable.

“All additional resources came from internal gallery budgets, mainly staff time. This was primarily for technical help to build the display cases... We could not have afforded this if it had gone out to an external contractor. Roughly speaking, 300 additional staff hours were used for the technical side of the project alone.”

Jonathan Wallis, Derby Museum and Art Gallery

3.7 Room to manoeuvre: the flexibility of Effective Collections projects

The four rounds of Effective Collections projects coincided with a period of rapid change for museums. Changes cited as affecting the progress of projects included restructuring and fluctuations in core funding; staff redundancies; shifts to more part-time staffing; and transition to trust status. Participants, however, knew they had been given the room by the MA to adjust objectives and timescales, as long as they ultimately achieved their goals.

How rapidly a project could progress depended on many factors: whether collection documentation was in order; the condition of objects; the complexity and scale of the collection; finding and appointing experts to support collections reviews; and unexpected occurrences, such as a flood. Many museums underestimated the scale of the task ahead of them and how long it would take to achieve. Yet despite these obstacles, museums took their Effective Collections projects very seriously.

Across the board, very few projects did not have a wider impact on the museum's collections policy and practice. There were cases where the Effective Collections project played a key role in reviewing policy overall and addressing issues of acquisition and disposal, as well as gaining support across the organisation for this.

"I can see very clearly how far we have come from the ideas stage. Initially (and for a long time) I was trying to get the stakeholders to understand the necessity of a coherent narrative in the form of a statement of purpose so that I could assess objects against this... We are now at the stage of disposing of objects by transfer to other Accredited museums, which feels like a huge leap."
Jane Whittaker, The Bowes Museum

In many cases, there was perhaps more to the process than participants had envisaged at the proposal stage. In others, an early decision was made to integrate the Effective Collections project into the museum's overall plans and strategy, even acting as a useful stalking horse for wider change. Either way, projects took longer to achieve than originally expected but all achieved what they set out to do. As shown in this report, many participants achieved much more besides.



Conclusion

4

Effective Collections projects focused on reviewing their existing collections to manage them better and use them more. There are still concerns across the museum sector about disposal, loans and transfer of objects, and Effective Collections participants should share in detail how they went about tackling these issues. Projects produced lots of resources and toolkits and so the Effective Collections online learning hub aims to bring these resources together and share some of the advice people from Effective Collections projects have built up.

Confidence is a key feature in all Effective Collections projects that unlocks a museum's ability to use its collections in new ways. The learning hub aims to capture some of the confidence of individuals who've participated in Effective Collections to help other museums undertaking similar work.

Have a look at the Effective Collections online learning hub to find out more:
www.museumsassociation.org/collections.



Appendix 1:

Projects funded through Effective Collections



As part of the Effective Collections programme, a number of grants were made available to museums with the aim of making better use of stored collections, sharing collections through long-term loans and taking a more active approach to disposal. This practical element of Effective Collections sought to stimulate a change in museum culture through action research.

Any Accredited museum or partnership of organisations that included an Accredited museum could apply. There were four project rounds, six-monthly from September 2009 to March 2011 and two types of grant were available.

Main Fund projects

Funding of up to £10,000 per project was made available for museums to review their collections and make better use of them as a result. Funding was available for:

- Module a: collections review to identify underused objects
- Module b: developing a workplan to make better use of objects; e.g. on loan and via transfer or alternative forms of disposal
- Module c: implementing the workplan.

Museums that did not need a collections review could begin at module b.

Special Project grants

Funding of up to £25,000 per project was made available to museums and partners for innovative projects that included loans and transfers. The criteria for these grants were based on:

- improved use of stored collections for demonstrable public outcomes
- impact on the museum, the sector and beyond
- innovation and ambition
- legacy and sustainability.

Awards

29 Main Fund and five Special Project grants were awarded over the four rounds. 26 Main Fund projects undertook all three modules.

Full phase: Main Fund projects Round one: September 2009

Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service

The project reviewed the community history collection and has led to a better understanding of the collection, as well as vastly improving storage of retained collections and the service's ability to utilise them with better efficacy. The project also led to the facilitation of a year-long documentation programme using a HLF Skills for the Future grant.

Dorset County Museums

The Accessible Archaeology project worked in partnership with museums in Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole and will eventually see up to 12 minor collections moved from the store of Dorset County Museum to smaller Accredited museums around the county. These collections will tell localised stories with objects that might otherwise have stayed in store.

Coventry Transport Museum

A review of objects located in the off-site store has led to a better understanding of the collection and a number of disposals and loans. The project has also implemented a new interpretation plan and new handling resources.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

The project reviewed a collection of over 4,000 spirit-preserved specimens and discovered a number of type specimens, raising the status and understanding of the collection.

Brighton and Hove Museums Service

A review of Booth Museum's natural sciences collection has resulted in the transfer and loan of objects to local museums in Bexhill, Horsham and Worthing. The museum has integrated new ways of working with the collection into its training of new staff.

Saffron Walden Museum

The project reviewed the world cultures collections of five museums: Saffron Walden, Wisbech, Hertford, Bishop's Stortford and Time & Tide in Great Yarmouth. The reviews of each collection informed new exhibitions and led to the development of an online resource linking the collections together.

Round two: March 2010

Berwick Museum and Art Gallery

Berwick is a small museum with only one member of staff and the project enabled the entire collection to be reviewed, resulting in the opening of a new gallery, a new collections strategy and a new acquisitions and disposal policy.

Ceredigion Museum

After accepting a bequest of a costume collection containing over 17,000 items, this project reviewed both the bequest and the museum's own collection, enabling it to choose the most appropriate items from both. The museum disposed of the remainder of the items by offering them to other museums, local drama groups and schools.

Herbert Art Gallery and Museum

The project began with a conservation audit to determine how the museum's costume collection could be used to engage different audiences. Outcomes included an exhibition, *All Dressed Up*, accompanied by a programme of events and handling resources for use by schools, community groups and university fashion students.

Orleans House Gallery

The gallery used this project to put young people at the heart of new strategies for interpreting and presenting its collections in preparation for a new study room facility.

Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery

Working with Nene Park Trust, the project reviewed the museum's archaeology collection. Its creative disposal methods have included using pottery shards in education sessions with young children, allowing participants to take a shard home.

Renaissance North West

The project reviewed and researched natural science collections in five regional museums: The Beacon in Whitehaven; Keswick Museum; Penrith and Eden Museum; Rochdale Arts and Heritage Service; and Stockport Museums.

Slough Museum

In partnership with local organisations including Age Concern and the Wessex Film and Sound Archive, the museum worked with its underused photographic and film collection to increase community access and engagement. The project saw local students curate their own exhibitions and hold reminiscence sessions with older visitors.

Wakefield Museum

Focusing on furniture and clocks in its social history collection, the museum was able to identify and bring dismantled objects together, making it possible to put some parts of the collection back into public use. The project has enabled museum staff to see a way forward in working with other areas of the collections.

Yorkshire Museum

The museum's Pocket Money project worked with non-museum users to find modern interpretations that would help audiences relate to its historic coin collection. Yorkshire Museum Trust has since received funding from ACE's main grant programme to continue the project and employ a curator of numismatics.

Round three: September 2010

Bowes Museum

The museum reviewed its English furniture collections, revitalising the collection and creating relevant displays. The project has used the collections knowledge gained to develop new interpretation and new partnerships.

Derby Museums Service

Derby's Showcase project reviewed four areas of the collection and worked with community groups to co-create small object displays in off-site showcases.

Ditchling Museum

The museum reviewed its collection of domestic and social history and created a new future strategy and collecting policy with a renewed focus on the artists and craftspeople of Ditchling in the early 20th century.

Doncaster Museum Service

The project improved the use of the museum's shell collection by establishing how it relates to the rest of the natural science collection and its importance as a research resource and general learning tool for education and public engagement.

Luton Culture

The project brought in an external expert to review the stored archaeology collection from a museum learning viewpoint and has developed activities linked to the national curriculum.

Museum of Design in Plastics

The project reviewed a recently received collection of over 400 horn items, identified potential loan venues to increase use of the collection and created new interpretative material.

National Mining Museum Scotland

The project worked with a number of local organisations to create loan boxes and a display case service that is being used to assist professional carers of elderly people from the Scottish coalmining communities.

Rural Museums Network

A comprehensive review of ploughs held in collections. A printed copy of the review has been distributed to all members of the network, providing a legacy to ensure the knowledge is passed on to future generations of curators.

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

The project reviewed the trust's agricultural and horticultural collections and has raised awareness within the organisation about the nature of its stored objects, enabling it to establish clear collecting priorities.

William Morris Society

A review of the collection to increase knowledge of the significant items, including unique designs, that it holds from Morris and Company. One key aim of the project was to raise awareness of the collection and publicise that the items are available for loan.

Round four: March 2011

Chiltern Open Air Museum

The project reviewed the museum's large collection of working farm machinery, leading to improved interpretation that will enhance the public's experience of an authentic working farm.

Leeds Museum and Galleries

A review of the museum's herbarium collection that conducted fieldwork with local community groups and schools to revisit sites that were collected from 100 years ago. This has enabled the museum to teach ecological and botanical techniques and document the collection for display in its discovery centre.

North Lanarkshire Council Museum Service

With help from specialists, this project reviewed one of Scotland's foremost cinema collections, which holds over 700 items ranging from projectors to ushers' uniforms. The project found ways to enhance the use of the collection through, for example, working in partnership with enthusiast groups.

Orkney Museums

A project to review the collection of the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre and Museum, which holds objects relating to the British Naval Fleet during World War I and II. The review has informed future conservation priorities for the collection and how it can be stored and displayed.

Full phase: Special Projects

NMS, STICK: £25,000 for Old Tools, New Uses

The project reviewed domestic technology collections across Scottish museums to make collaborative decisions about disposal of duplicates. Appropriate items such as sewing machines were recycled back into daily use in African countries via a charity called Tools for Self-Reliance. The project also created master catalogues of reviewed material and developed a schools resource.

Contemporary Collecting Wales: £25,000

The project investigated issues relating to the collection of contemporary (post-1950) objects in museums throughout Wales, with overall coordination provided by a steering group of representatives from national and local museums. The pilot stage focused on sports collections and an exhibition developed from this will be on tour at 10 venues across Wales until June 2013.

The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL Museums and Collections: £25,000

The project is creating displays of otherwise unseen, stored material in the newly refurbished Egyptian Education and Cultural Bureau (ECB), an arm of the Higher Education ministry in Egypt and London Embassy. The Petrie currently displays around 10% of its collection on site, and aims to display as much as another 10% at the ECB on long-term loan.

The New Art Gallery Walsall: £25,000

The gallery has worked with contemporary artists Bob and Roberta Smith since September 2009 to unlock the secrets of the Epstein Archive, which was purchased by the gallery in 2006. That part of the project saw the development of a permanent gallery space for rolling displays of material from the Epstein Archive.

Derby Museums Service: £19,000 for Down the Back of the Sofa

As part of the Vintage Festival 2011, Derby Museums Service recreated a 1981 lounge at the Royal Festival Hall decorated with objects, images and oral history recordings from its collection. The lounge gave visitors an opportunity to explore the changing nature of design through contact with museum objects. The project has been shortlisted for a 2012 Museum and Heritage Award for Excellence in the category "Best Temporary and Touring Exhibition".

Pilot phase projects

The pilot phase of Effective Collections funded nine less formal projects to test ways of reviewing collections and identify opportunities for improving use of collections and brokering loans and disposals. Participants included the National Portrait Gallery; Tate; museums in Wales; Falkirk Museum Service; Plymouth Museum; National Museums Liverpool; Hawick Museum; a sharing collections project in the south east; and a collections review project in the north west.

More information about all the projects and advice on undertaking similar projects can be found on the Effective Collections learning hub,
www.museumsassociation.org/collections.

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Museums Association
24 Calvin Street
London E1 6NW

T: 020 7426 6910

www.museumsassociation.org

