

# EVALUATION REPORT FOR SHARE ACADEMY

## TO UCL MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

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## SUMMARY

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**Share Academy** is a partnership between University College London, The University of the Arts and the London Museums Group. The six month pilot project investigated the extent to which capacity and resilience within London's specialist museums could be built by collaborating with sources of expertise in the Higher Education sector. The pilot project completed at the end of April 2013. The programme is funded by Arts Council England. The pilot of Share Academy consisted of a scoping study (which is reported separately), three focus groups and three case studies, which covered only some of these types of collaborations. Different types of collaborations will be explored in the next stage of Share Academy.

**Collaborations** between universities and museums take many forms: student projects, internships, research on collections, other research, collaborative degrees, guest talks, visiting lectures etc. Costs and benefits vary depending on the form and terms of the collaboration.

Collaborations between universities and museums are judged to be highly positive but not always comfortable. Distance can be particularly marked for small museums and universities where the dimension of size is added to other differences of culture and objectives. Across the field, a number of possible **mismatches** were identified:

- **Planning horizons.** Museums tend to have long term plans for their priority projects and activities. This reduces their scope to respond to incidental projects that arise from university courses.
- **Best time of year.** One of our case studies started in September (a very busy time for universities), so that work backed up to March/April (a very busy time for museums).
- **Availability.** Museum events often happen at the week-end, when academics might be unavailable.
- **Communication media.** Academics might depend on email, while museum staff value personal contact.
- **Language.** One of our projects was initially presented as a consultancy exercise where students would have a client experience. However, the brief was written by the university not the museum, the discussion meetings all took place at the university, the students had never worked together before, indeed they had never worked in England before. It was soon clear that describing the project as a client experience was misleading given that its central purpose was for student learning.
- **Reporting.** Academics prioritise publishing, which has a long lead in time. Museums prioritise organisation-specific, timely feedback in a form that can be presented to funders.
- **Views of intellectual property.** Universities seek ownership of research in order to publish; museums seek ownership of findings in order to replicate work or pass on lessons to partner museums.
- **Views of quality.** There are different elements to quality: universities might prioritise validity, museums prioritise usefulness and relevance.

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- **Need.** Students tend to seek exciting projects especially those that are around idea generation. Museums often need support with routine work such as archiving or cataloguing, and would like universities to communicate that these are important parts of work life. Museums are not usually short of ideas, whether from staff or volunteers. They tend to be short of capacity and specialist expertise.

So far Share Academy has identified these **good practices**:

- **Clarity.** One project had a clear statement of objectives and outcomes, early identification of the time input that the partners could contribute, a clear statement of responsibilities, a precise timetable, and articulation of any terms including any financial liabilities. This approach helped to manage the expectations of the museum and avoid over-promising.
- **Professionalism.** One project team had one central contact for communication who produced a project plan, Gant chart, progress report, evaluation plan, and memorandum of understanding. In addition, Share Academy had a trouble-shooter/arbitrator to resolve problems that arose.
- **Value added.** The net benefit (or net cost) to the museum can vary widely depending on how the university team conducts itself. A good team uses museum staff time sparingly and respectfully, and exploits opportunities to add value through providing training, delivering customized reports that fit the museum's decision-times, making connections, seeking publicity, and leaving behind resources.

The **benefits** to museums can include:

- **Status.** Museums reinforce their intellectual credibility from association with prestigious institutions.
- **Knowledge.** Collaborations can give museums access to expertise in specialist areas such as digital technologies, archaeology, finance, marketing, design etc.
- **Ideas.** Students can provide insights and ideas that are especially valuable in areas in which they have specialist expertise e.g. how to market to young people or use social media.
- **Capacity.** Students are often assumed to constitute a source of free labour for museums. Academics can help to fill in the gap in museum research.
- **Profile.** Collaborations can be used to generate publicity.
- **Stimulation of action.** Collaborations can provide the internal case or energy for further organisational development.
- **Training.** Museums gain where staff or volunteers are trained to carry out some of the research or evaluation in the future.
- **Resources.** These could be toolkits, hard ware or equipment. One of our case studies gained iPads; another got a popcorn machine that they could use for workshops.
- **Contributing.** Museums place a value on supporting, and ideally helping to diversity, the future workforce in the UK, and strengthening the evidence base for the sector.

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Relationships are more beneficial to museums and to universities where they are **longer term** because:

- The challenges mean that start-up costs in building relationships are high. It is less time-effective to resolve these for a short-term project.
- Projects can be designed to better contribute to, and link with, a museum's strategic priorities and processes.
- The impact is likely to be higher.

Share Academy found a strong support for a **brokerage** role that would help:

- Give information to stimulate thought about possible collaborations
- Make connections between universities and museums with similar interests.
- Identify the right person within an institution.
- Provide guidance and resources on good practice e.g. model memoranda of understanding.
- Provide an independent trouble-shooting function.

Even with this brokerage service, collaborations are not cost free. Share Academy found that collaborations can have a net cost to museums and universities. The success of future collaborations in large measure rests on the scope to provide relatively small sums of **money** to compensate partners for their input. At the moment a main source of funding for collaboration is through the AHRC, which inevitably places the academic institution in the driving seat. Some balancing force from the museums' perspective is needed.

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