

# Museum-university partnerships in REF impact case studies: a review

May 2016

Prepared by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

**A report for the Museum University Partnerships Initiative**



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

The Museum University Partnership Initiative (MUPI) is a collaboration between Share Academy and the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), funded by Arts Council England. The project aims to maximise the potential for museums and universities to work together to mutually beneficial aims. It explores how the Higher Education sector can be opened up to smaller and medium sized museums whose unique collections and engagement expertise are often an underutilised resource that could benefit academics, teaching staff, and students within the Higher Education sector, whilst adding value to the work of the museums involved and contributing to their long term resilience.

This report shares the results of a specific component of MUPI, a review of how museum-university partnerships featured in the REF.

The MUPI project involved a range of activities alongside this review. These included:

- Networking events ('sandpits') to bring together university and museum staff to develop project ideas
- A pilot study of museum-university partnerships involving a literature review, survey and qualitative interviews
- A review of other strategic partnership initiatives
- A stakeholder event where the interim findings of the project were shared (March 2016)
- Convening an advisory group and funders forum

Full details of the MUPI project can be found on the NCCPE website where other outputs from the project can also be accessed: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/current-projects/museum-university-partnerships-initiative>

## Introduction

### The assessment of impact in the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework introduced the assessment of research impact for the first time. Departments not only had to submit research ‘outputs’ (e.g. journal articles), they also had to submit a sample of ‘impact case studies’ to demonstrate how their research created impact, defined as:

*“any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia”.*

6975 impact case studies were submitted to REF 2014, and 6640 of these were published in a searchable database.<sup>1</sup> The case studies provide an important source of data about how universities are engaging with stakeholders and publics ‘beyond academia’<sup>2</sup>. We conducted a short review of the impact case studies, to explore three broad questions:

- What are the key drivers for and barriers to museum-university partnerships in the current UK context?
- What are the current models for collaborative practice between universities and museums and what are the key challenges and benefits of each?
- How do these collaborations benefit those involved, and how is this evaluated?

### Our review and sample

Of the 6640 case studies submitted to the REF, 879 feature the word ‘museum’ or ‘museums’. The distribution of these across the four main panels is striking, with the majority in the Arts and Humanities. Nearly 40% of the case studies in this area featured museums. Only 2% of those in medical science and health did the same.

#### ***How did the involvement of museums manifest itself across the four Main Panels?***

Panel D (Arts and Humanities) dominated the sample.

<b>Panel</b>	<b>Number of mentions of ‘museum/s’</b>	<b>% of total case studies submitted to this panel</b>
Panel A <b>Medical sciences and health</b>	36	2.3% (1591)
Panel B <b>Physical sciences and engineering</b>	77	5.2% (1474)
Panel C <b>Social Sciences</b>	130	6.6% (1959)
Panel D <b>Arts and humanities</b>	638	39.5% (1616)

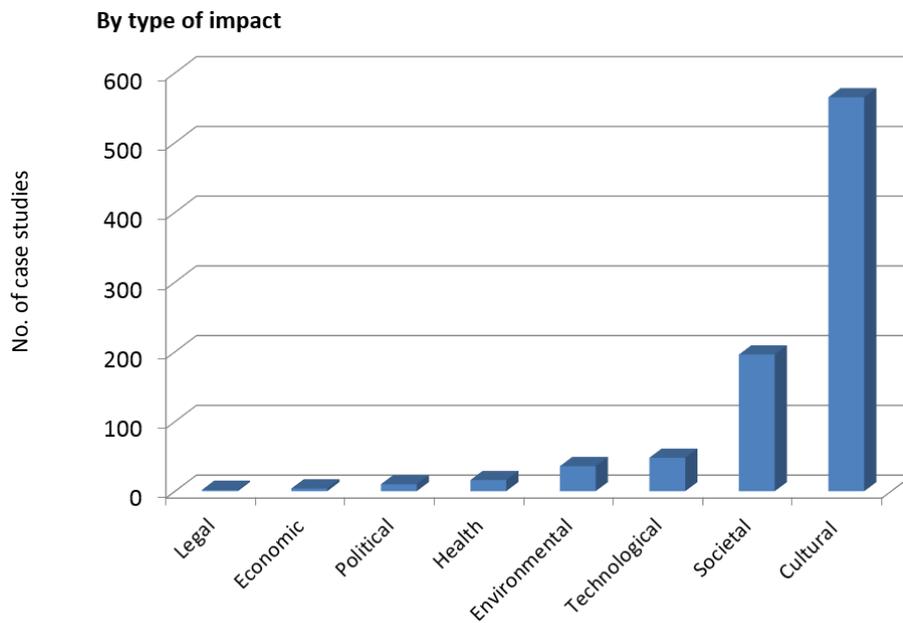
*Number of case studies featuring the words ‘museum’ or ‘museums’.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/>

<sup>2</sup> More details about the REF process can be found in the appendix.

## Which types of impact were realised through the interaction between universities and museums?

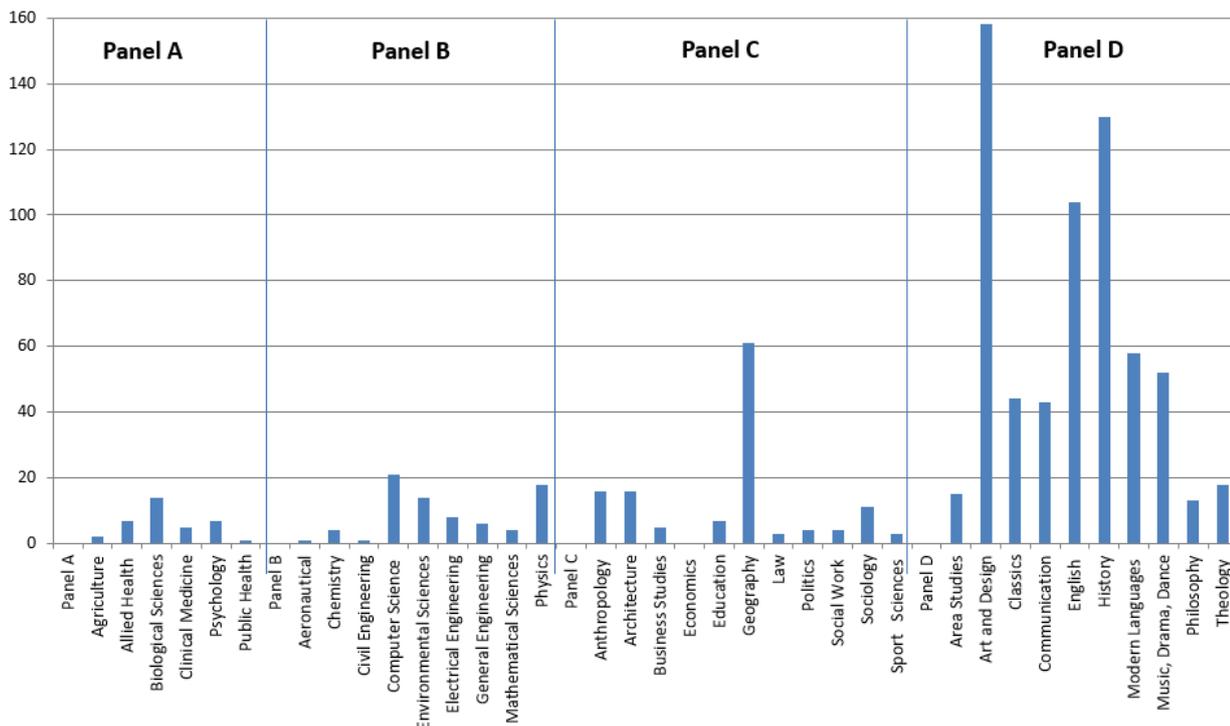
The team at Kings College London who built the impact case study database, coded each of the 6640 case studies according to the main type of impact that they generated. Each case study could only be categorised with one such type of impact. The sample of 837 case studies featuring 'museum(s)' were predominantly coded as realising cultural impacts.



## How did the involvement of museums manifest itself within different Units of Assessment?

The chart below shows how museums featured most prominently in Art and Design, English and History.

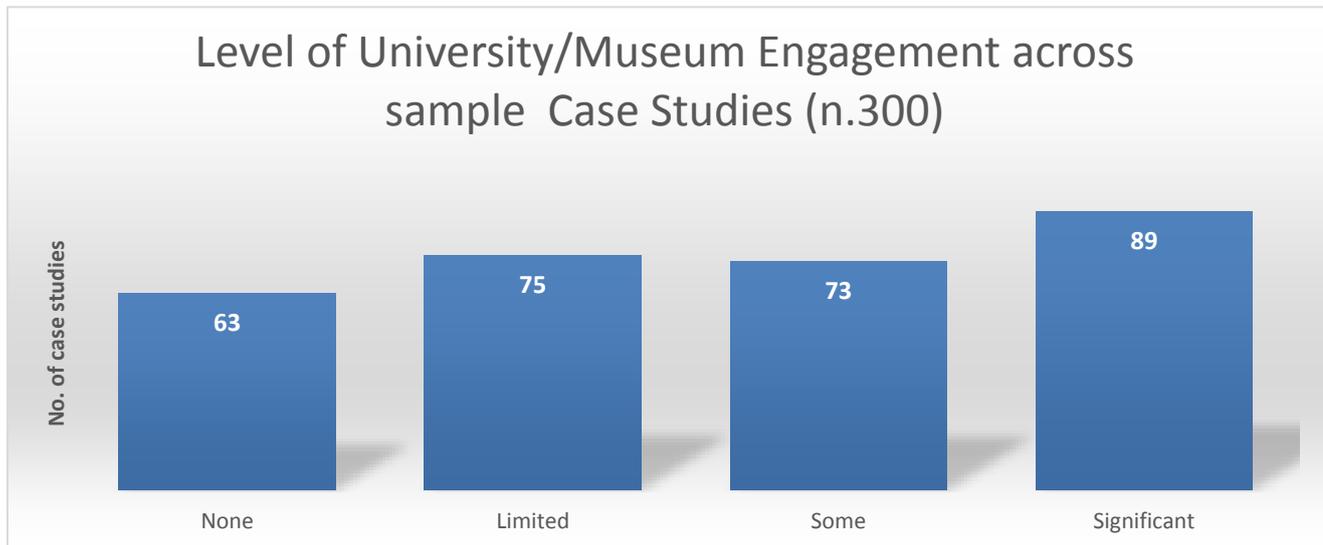
### Mention of 'museum(s)' by Unit of Assessment



## Sampling the case studies

We identified a sample of 300 case studies for more detailed analysis, matching the distribution of the 'museum(s)' case studies across the four main panels. The extent of interaction between the researcher(s) and museum(s) was analysed:

- **None.** No university/museum contact, or attempt to work collaboratively on shared projects.
- **Limited.** Evidence of some interaction, but very limited contact between the two
- **Some.** Some degree of collaboration is evident
- **Significant.** Significant and sustained collaboration between museums and universities.



63 of the sample involved no interaction/collaboration. No further analysis of these was conducted. The remaining 237 case studies were reviewed using a series of coding frameworks to explore different topics, including:

- The types of impact being claimed for the collaboration
- The types of museums involved (small/medium sized; regional; national; university museums)
- The areas of museum practice which were involved (e.g. curatorial; visitor experience; commercial)
- The benefits/impact accruing for the museums
- The motivations on both sides for entering into the collaboration
- Who initiated the relationship
- The sources of funding/role of funding in supporting the collaboration
- Other partners involved (e.g. policy makers – national or regional; funders; public sector bodies etc.)
- The extent and nature of public engagement featured

It is worth noting at the outset that REF case studies have limitations when it comes to identifying and articulating the benefits of partnership work to museums (such as improved visibility and reputation, improved knowledge and skills among staff and volunteers, improved self-confidence) because they are written from a university point of view. The key findings should be read with this in mind.

## Key findings

### ***Are there significant differences in the nature of collaboration between the four main panels?***

The results suggest that a greater degree of collaboration exists between museums and researchers in Panels C and D. Panel B has significantly fewer examples of collaboration than the other three panels, with over 70% of the case studies here involving no or limited collaboration.

### ***At which stages of the research cycle did the collaborations occur?***

Contact most frequently occurs when academics are looking to disseminate their research findings. There was very little evidence of researchers and museum staff conceiving shared research projects. Panel C was where collaborative approaches to research were most evident

### ***Which areas of museum practice are most frequently cited as benefiting from the research?***

Exhibition development dominated the sample. There was limited evidence of the partnerships securing economic returns for the museums and the regions in which they are based.

### ***What impacts/benefits were most commonly cited as arising for museums as a result of the partnership/collaboration?***

Impacts on outreach and visitor experience were the two areas most commonly cited. Only 26 of the 237 case studies analysed did not record any impact on the outreach or visitor experience of a particular institution. It is worth noting that the case studies are written from the university's point of view, so some benefits for the museum arising from the partnership may not have been recorded.

### ***What measures of impact were most frequently cited?***

30% of the sampled case studies provided no evidence of impact. Of those that did, the two most significant types of evidence were visitor or user numbers and staff testimonials. Limited use was made of evaluation or qualitative data from publics who engaged with outputs from collaborations. It is worth noting that museums and universities understand and evaluate impact in very different ways.

### ***What evidence is provided of the benefits to academics/researchers?***

The sampled case studies reveal that the primary benefit of museum-university collaborations to academics were the opportunities they afforded them to disseminate their research, and engage a range of audiences with it. However, it should be noted that the case studies did not invite academics to evidence the contribution made by the collaboration to their research or to their own knowledge or skills: the focus was firmly on describing impacts 'beyond academia.'

### ***What roles do museums staff play in the collaborations?***

Perhaps unsurprisingly (given the dominance of dissemination in the partnerships) the most frequent role museum staff played was to support researchers in sharing their research. There were however some instances which highlight the potential of museum-university collaborations for creating and developing new knowledge, not just disseminating it. These included more 'traditional' approaches, such

as joint research projects which result in exhibitions and catalogues, and ones which were focussed around digital products and resources.

***What types and sizes of museums feature?***

Of the sampled case studies, national museums were the most common museum type to engage in collaborations with universities – by a significant margin. The second most common were international museums. The case studies sample involves very few smaller museums, who appear far less likely to enter into collaborative projects with universities than medium and large sized institutions. Not only do they feature much less frequently in the sample, they also almost never initiate the contact/collaboration. There is evidence that informal and formal networks play a critical role in building connections which lead to successful projects.

***What types of universities engage in museum partnerships?***

Russell Group universities dominate the case study sample.

***What is the geographical reach of the collaborations?***

More often than not, these extend beyond the location where the university is based. A number of factors account for the reach, including the tendency of many projects to involve multiple partners, and produce digital outputs.

***Which other partners are typically involved?***

More than half of the sampled case studies included partners other than universities and museums. Community groups played a significant role.

***Which publics typically feature?***

The most frequently cited publics were: 'visitors'; online audiences; residents; school pupils.

***What types of public engagement featured?***

Over 90% of the sample involved some public engagement. It was encouraging to see that in over 70% of the case studies the engagement with the public was more than simply dissemination, and involved them in meaningful and significant encounters with the research. The majority of activities cited were designed to meet the specific needs and interests of defined constituencies.

## Reflections on the findings

While the review demonstrates a relatively healthy amount of interaction and engagement between museums and universities, it reveals a number of limitations to the scope of the partnership work being reported. Several areas seem particularly striking and present genuinely important opportunities for the MUPI project to address in future activity. These include:

Opportunity	Implications for the MUPI project / possible response
<p><b>Broadening the discipline base</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Arts and Humanities dominate the sample (with nearly 40% of all the case studies submitted in this area involving museums. In stark contrast, only 2% of those in medical sciences; 5% in physical sciences and engineering and 6.6% in social sciences feature museums)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create opportunities for academics working in currently under-represented subject areas to network with museum colleagues to generate project ideas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opening up collaborations in a broader range of museum practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity is currently heavily skewed to traditional and familiar areas of museum practice – e.g. exhibitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage academics and museum staff to explore the potential of collaboration in other areas of museum practice (e.g. business development)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Shifting collaboration ‘upstream’</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In many cases academics only contact museums when they have results to disseminate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create opportunities for academics and museum staff to meet and develop new, collaborative projects with active museum involvement; or which are led by the museum</li> </ul>
<p><b>Targeting small museums</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very few small museums feature in the sample.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively target small museums and provide opportunities for them to begin to build links to academics, and ensure small amounts of resource are available to fund their time</li> </ul>
<p><b>Broadening and deepening the approach to impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A relatively narrow range of impacts are being claimed/realised – heavily skewed to informal learning and communication.</li> <li>The quality of evidence and evaluation being cited is often poor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage collaborations that address a broader range of potential outcomes (e.g. commercial activity)</li> <li>Find better ways to exploit museum expertise in evaluation</li> </ul>

# REF Case Studies Report

This section of the report provides more detail of seven key areas of the review:

- When collaborations occur in the research cycle
- Areas of museum practice featured
- Impacts/benefits of collaboration to museums
- Measuring impacts/benefits for museums
- Benefits for academics
- Museum types and sizes
- The role of public engagement

It explains how the coding was developed; provides texture in the form of quotations from case studies; presents our analysis and offers some reflections on the data.

## 1. When collaborations occurred in the research cycle

The case studies were coded according to the different stages of the research cycle when academics and universities worked with museums. These four different stages were:

**Conception.** Cases when museums and universities/academics worked collaboratively to conceive research proposals. These tended to be ambitious projects which enjoyed considerable financial support. For instance, they might aim to produce a large-scale exhibitions, or significantly impact upon the lives of individuals and communities.

*'Based at Birkbeck...the AHRC funded research project 'Weaving Communities of Practice' has made a substantial impact on cultural life by creating new systems of cataloguing and digitising collections of Andean textiles and developing a digital, online database to manage complex visual information. Two museums in the UK and 10 in Latin America (Bolivia, Chile and Peru) have directly benefited from the project both in the development of the database and in the training provided; rural communities in Bolivia have also benefited from the recognition and recovery of their traditional craft.'*

CS 18130, 'Andean Textiles', 1

**Research.** Instances when academics undertook research in partnership with museum staff. This could result from academics seeking the advice and expertise of museum curators, or from them being involved in shared research projects.

*'Based on the analysis of nearly 100 history museums and exhibitions and interviews with 64 cultural policy-makers and museum directors and curators throughout Europe, this research has led to the co-authored book Europa ausstellen.'*

CS 15875, 'Exhibiting Europe', 1

**Application.** 'Application' entails instances when academics and museums worked together to use the research of academics to inform museum practice. This could entail museums making use of university products to preserve or shed light on their collections, or academic expertise into curatorial practice.

*'Research at Cardiff University has identified the corrosion mechanisms driving the destruction of this iron and...has quantified the effectiveness of...treatments either to prevent or slow its corrosion. The research has led to the development of clear guidance for devising, implementing and managing preservation strategies for iron. These have been adopted by English Heritage, the British Museum and other institutions.'*

CS 3404, 'Evidence based management strategies', 1

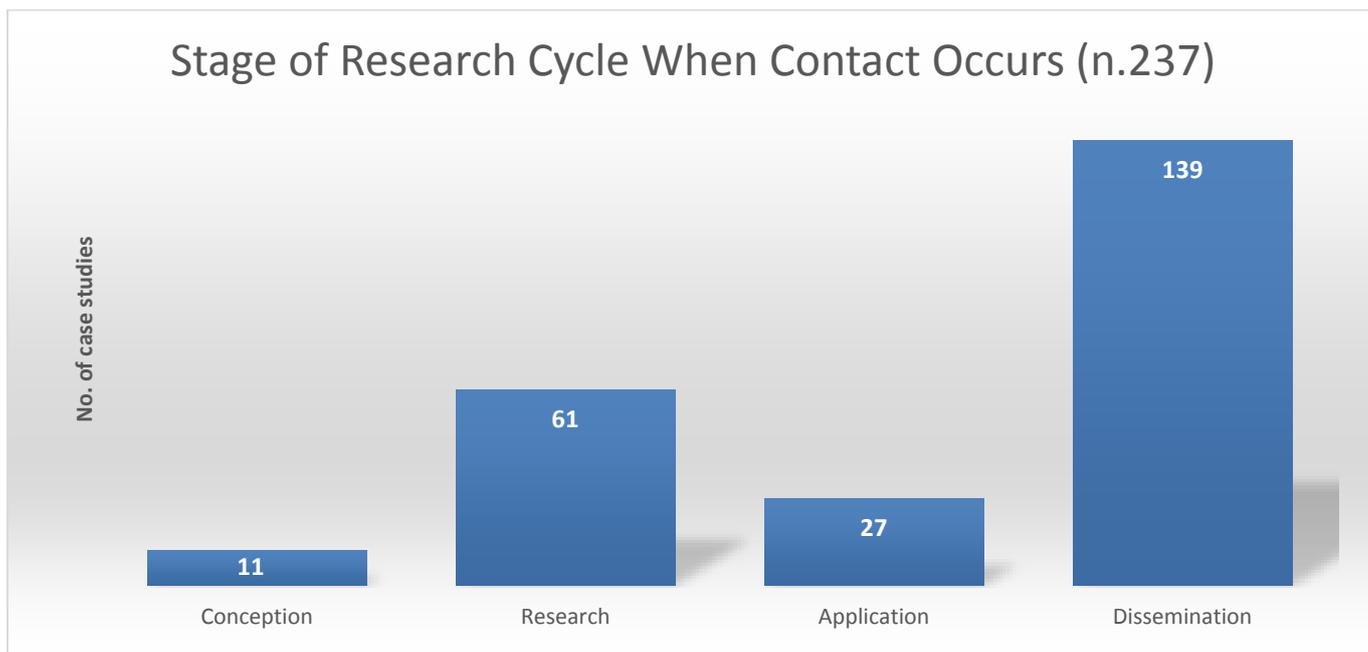
**Dissemination.** Cases when academics worked with museums to share their research with a wider audience. For instance, they might contribute to exhibitions, advise on the wider work of museums, or give talks at institutions.

*'Most recently... he (Dr Matt Cook) led a discussion at the Geffrye Museum of the Home in anticipation of his forthcoming *Queer Domesticities* book. The event was fully booked at 100.*

CS 18937, 'Gay history-making in the community', 3

### 1.1. Stage of Research Cycle when Contact Occurred.

Academics and universities would most frequently begin working together when academics were looking to disseminate their research.



## 2. Areas of Museum Practice Involved

The case studies were coded according to which areas of museum practice collaborations impacted upon. This analysis highlighted how collaborations could influence a range of areas of museum activity. For instance, exhibitions could also involve academics supporting a museum's outreach programmes, see them giving lectures and talks on their research, or assisting in the making of museum products and resources:

- **Exhibitions.** REF case studies highlight the varied contributions which academics can make to museum exhibitions. They may be involved in their conception, or the process of researching objects for them. Alternatively, their contributions may only begin at later stages, when they provide advice and feedback to curators and other museum staff, or contribute items to be exhibited.

*'The outcomes of the Wandular project were then exhibited at the London Design Museum (July 2013) as part of *The Future is Here* show, in partnership with the Technology Strategy Board.'*

CS 39793, 'Designing for Emotional Durability', 2

- **Curatorial Skills.** Museum-university collaborations can see academic involvement in various curatorial practices and procedures, which are focussed around the day to day running of museums, rather than exhibitions. University projects which help conserve a museum's holdings or are focussed around their presentation and interpretation fall under this category.

*'Additionally, c. 2,000 objects from Sierra Leone National Museum collections – which previously had no accurate record of its collection – were digitised. Beyond providing access to the objects, this complete written and visual record of the collection significantly improved its security.'*

CS 40701, 'Reanimating cultural heritage in Sierra Leone', 2

- **Funding.** Academics might identify possible funding opportunities for museums, or also assist with their funding proposals.

*'King...assisted the Norwich Castle Museum in its successful bid for funding to acquire important examples of Norwich medieval glass, and helped with the preparation of the new medieval gallery where it is exhibited.'*

CS 29, 'The Norfolk Stained Glass Medieval Project', 3

- **Outreach Programmes.** Collaborations may involve academics supporting a museum's educational and outreach programmes. This could involve workshops for schools, family oriented events, or projects which look to engage local communities.

*'The Ure Museum is at the heart of the Department of Classics, and a key part of the UoA's leadership in digital humanities work. The database has generated very considerable impact on... digital animation work and pedagogical practice in schools, through thousands of visitor interactions, scores of workshop events, and several special projects.'*

CS39797, 'The Ure Museum Database', 1

- **Museum Products/Resources.** Academics may help museums produce products and resources which they can either sell or make freely available to the public. This may include books/catalogues to accompany exhibitions, digital resources, or podcasts.

*'Assistant Curator Hannah Fleming comments that the 'description of her research and discussion with curatorial and learning staff about how it could be applied to creating new displays and interpretation helped us to develop a new collections app... The app, a mobile-friendly website that can be viewed on smartphones and tablets, allows visitors to access information about hard-to-see objects like books in the museum's period rooms.'*

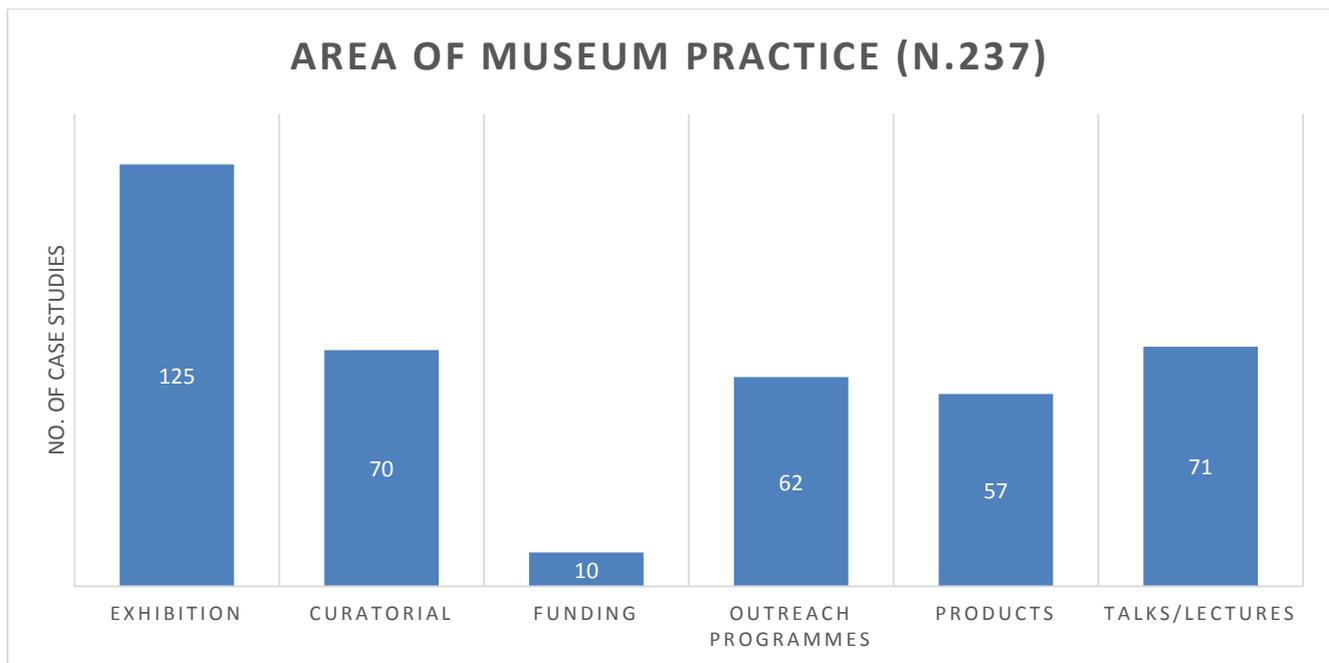
CS 19231, 'Enhancing Public Understanding of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Popular Culture', 3

- **Talks/Lectures.** Academics may be invited to give lectures on their research at museums. This may be a one off event, or part of a wider museum run lecture series exhibition. In this category we differentiated talks/lectures from outreach programmes, on the basis that they will be much more heavily focussed on an academic speaking about their research.

*'The publication of Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie (2009) led directly to an invitation to discuss the history of the Chinese community in Limehouse at the Museum of London Docklands.'*

CS 24688, 'British and Chinese Cultural Relations', 2

## 2.1. Academic Involvement in Different Areas



The graph details the number of times that the sampled REF case studies involved collaborations focussing on different areas of museum practice. It highlights how museum exhibitions frequently drive museum-university partnerships, with over half of the case studies which detailed some degree of collaboration, focussing on this area of museum practice.

The low number featuring 'funding' case studies can partly be explained by the fact that we only coded instances when academics supported museums in their efforts to achieve funding for a museum-run project. It did not record instances when university/museum collaborations were jointly awarded external funding; this is something which will be explored in later sections.

It is worth noting that the case studies often detail how an academic's work with museum curators and staff to develop exhibitions led to other long-term changes, e.g. to networks or practice:

*'Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery significantly modified its policy and practice as a direct result of the exhibition's success. In the words of the manager of Nottingham's museums, the research undertaken by Daniels and Bonehill "showed the art of the possible" by considering "other collections outside of our area and our collection, further afield and over many years, adding layers of knowledge and creating a legacy for the collections".'*

CS 28671, 'Shaping Policy and Practice', 3

As well as this, products and resources will often be produced as a consequence of exhibitions. This not only includes the catalogues and books which accompany these events, but also a range of digital resources, such as podcasts

*'Taylor advised the V&A on the selection of dress for the 'International Arts and Crafts' exhibition, contributing a text to the accompanying publication.'*

CS 39786, 'Designing History and the History of Design', 3

*'The Kabuki Heroes project was also the occasion for the British Museum to add major works of kabuki-related art from Osaka to the national collections and these are now available to scholars and the public worldwide through the BM's Collections Online.'*

CS 42788, 'Bringing Kabuki Prints', 4

### 3. Impacts/Benefits of Collaborations for Museums

The REF invited researchers to detail impacts 'beyond academia'. The coding below was developed to capture the types of impact/benefit for museums which the case studies typically claim:

- **Acquired Collections.** Academics who are involved in museum exhibitions from an early stage, may play a key role in researching and acquiring collections for it. As well as this, museums may purchase or loan academic art works for exhibitions they are holding, or academics might donate objects or research findings to be showcased at a particular institution.

*'The Finopulos collection was recently donated to the Benaki Museum, thus making these texts available to a wide public.'*

CS 34499, 'East looks west', 3

*'A dedicated, permanent and self-contained slavery section was installed at the new M-Shed museum in 2011... She (Dr Madge Dresser) helped to author displays and obtain artefacts for the exhibition and is also featured in one of the filmed displays.'*

CS 40859, 'Transforming public awareness', 2

- **Collection Conservation/Digitisation.** Academic projects which work with a museum's collections, can do much to ensure their long-term preservation and accessibility. As well as projects which ensure their physical preservation, university-run projects might also help catalogue, photograph and digitise a museum's holdings.

*'Research by Libby Sheldon into the history and technology of paints and pigments has benefited conservation specialists and art professionals based in both museums and the art trade.'*

CS 41125, 'The benefits of Painting Analysis', 1

- **Income.** Academic support which contributes to the success of an exhibition, their advice with funding proposals, and books/catalogues which they write or contribute to, can all help raise funds for the institution they are working with.

*Professor Gareth Williams was a Trustee at Dr Jenner's House, Berkeley (now the Edward Jenner Museum) from 2009-11 and was the Chair of the Trust from 2010-11...He is a regular speaker and fundraiser at the museum, which receives the royalties from his book.*

CS 40328, 'Working with health professionals', 3

- **Outreach.** REF case studies highlight how academics will often contribute to the outreach and engagement programmes of museums. We defined 'outreach' as entailing both talks and lectures given by academics at a particular institution, as well as a museum's wider outreach and public engagement programme. This category also includes digital products made freely available by museums, which are used to reach and engage a wide audience.

*'Wallace- Hadrill also took part in both live transmissions of the BM show, Pompeii Live and Pompeii Live for Schools to cinemas in the UK on 18 and 19 June, and shown to audiences in over 500 cinemas in the USA and Canada on 25 September.'*

CS 19037, 'Herculaneum', 3

*'Increased public awareness of the trade card collection and the online catalogue has been achieved by means of a series of films, 'Unlocking History at Waddesdon', that explore the research and examine a selection of trade*

*cards in-depth with the researchers and Waddesdon's Head of Collections. With the aim of bringing the collection to new audiences, the films are available on YouTube and, since January 2013, have received 808 views.'*

CS 23556, 'Selling Consumption', 3

- **Raise a Museum's Profile.** Academic involvement in exhibitions which attract numerous new visitors, large amounts of publicity, or are procured by other institutions, can help raise a museum's regional, national or international reputation. Academic-instigated collaborative projects, can also help small and medium sized institutions built relationships with larger museums.

*'An additional benefit of the exhibition was for the Shipley Gallery itself, whose then curator, confirms not only the rise in visitor numbers and national reviews in The Times and The Guardian, but that loans to a small regional centre from such major galleries as the British Museum, the V&A, the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain and the Wellcome Library would not have been possible without the academic partnership.'*

CS 35166, 'Culture and Disease', 3

- **Staff Training/Expertise.** REF case studies highlight how having access to the expertise and contacts of academics can significantly benefit and develop the practices of museum staff, and in-particular curators.

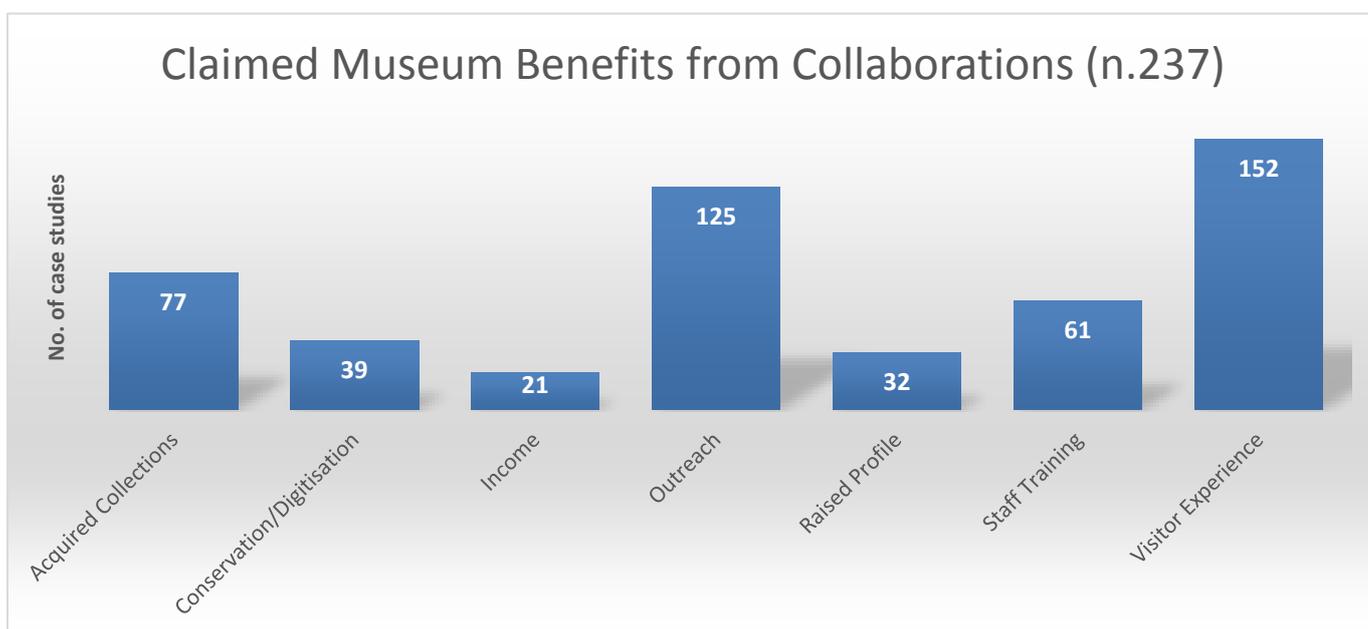
*'Georgios Boudalis (Book Conservator, Museum of Byzantium Culture, Thessaloniki) writes of the St Catherine's project to 'myself, and many colleagues [...] the experience changed the way we perceive and value historic books.'*

CS 39927, 'Ligatus Research Centre', 4

- **Visitor Experience.** By advising on museum exhibitions, assisting the wider practices of curators, or producing text and audio for museum holdings, academics can help improve and enhance the visitor experience of a particular institution.

*'Positive visitor feedback, both written and informal, is indicative of the impact of the museum's research-based displays (see 5.4). Comments include: 'Excellent presentation. Attention to modern research very interesting'; 'I think the museum gave me a good insight into climate change.'*

CS 18004, 'Research at the Scott Polar Institute', 3



The two areas of museum practice where case studies most often claim impact/benefit are outreach and visitor experience. Of course, these areas are to a large extent inter-dependent. For instance, acquiring collections will frequently help improve the experiences of those who visit a museum. Similarly, the digitisation of museum collections and holdings, can be used to develop and enhance outreach programmes.

*‘Through the Reanimating Cultural Heritage project, various initiatives were developed to strengthen the relationship between schools and the Sierra Leone National Museum: 200 stand-alone DVD versions of the digital heritage resource were distributed to schools, colleges, universities and community ‘access points.’*

CS 40701, ‘Reanimating Cultural Heritage’, 3

As a whole, the case study sample demonstrates that a primary focus of most museum-university collaborations will be to engage and speak to various publics. Only 26 of the 237 case studies analysed do not record any impact on the outreach or visitor experience of a particular institution.

However, the graph above also highlights that the benefits of museum-university partnerships may reach well beyond these areas. It showcases the economic benefit of collaborations, with twenty-one case studies detailing how collaborations bolstered the financial positions of museums. Some also reference the economic benefits brought about to a region or city, as a result of a highly popular exhibition.

*‘As an example of the economic impact of the research, the exhibition brought direct visitor spend of almost £5 million to the city of Liverpool, in which it was initially presented.’*

CS 42673, ‘Picasso Peace and Freedom’, 1

The case studies provide a strong sense of how partnerships with universities can support the growth of museums, particularly ones which are small and medium sized. Of the thirty-three case studies which are coded as ‘raising a museum’s profile’, eight involve museums classified as ‘small’, sixteen include ‘medium’ sized institutions, and nine ‘large’. The benefits accruing to small and medium sized museums as a result of collaborations are further detailed in the quotes below.

*‘The project was fundamental in building a working relationship with Porthcurno Telegraph Museum (PTM) that now paves the way for future research-based collaborations. The exhibition also raised the profile of PTM. A new section of the website was created for PTM, greatly improving its online presence and user experience.’*

CS 39775, ‘Connecting Cornwall’, 1

*According to the curator of the Town Hall Museum, this ‘was a really interesting and valuable project’... Part of the legacy of Gaunt’s work with the curator lies in her continued access to an extended knowledge network which the museum will continue to draw on in the future to consolidate the knowledge base behind its exhibitions.*

CS 30036, ‘The commemoration and preservation of local culture’, 3

#### **4. Measuring Impacts/Benefits for Museums**

As well as exploring the types of impact/benefit which case studies claim for their collaborations with museums, we reviewed whether they support these claims with evidence, and if so what the nature of this evidence was. The coding we developed included:

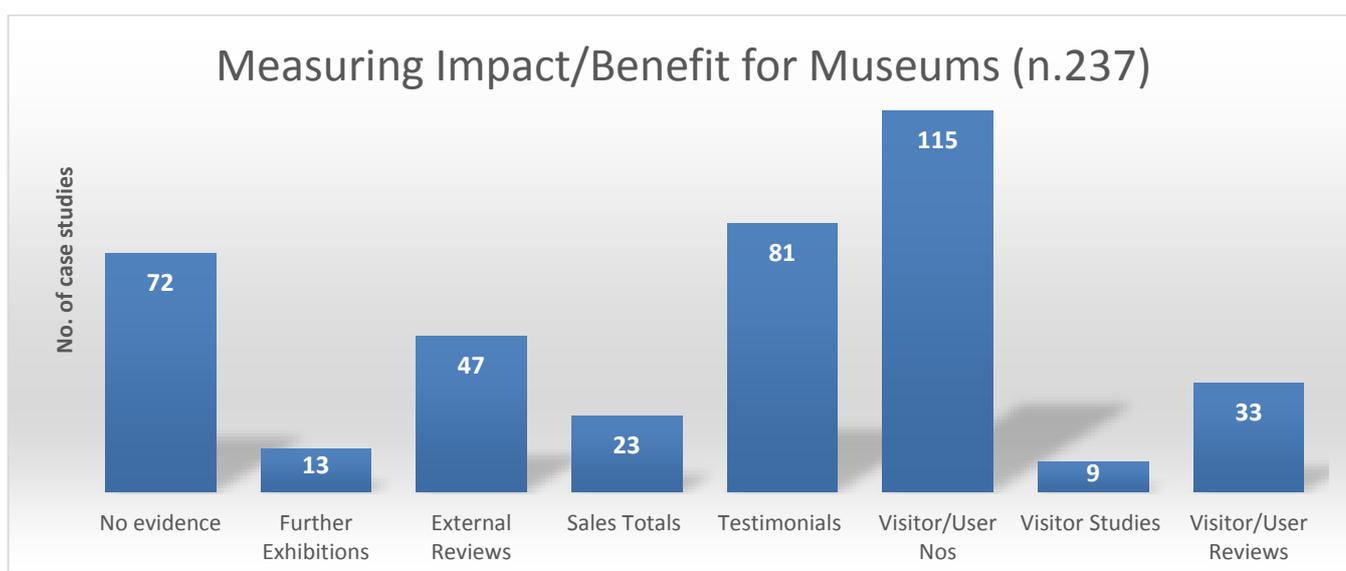
- **Further/knock on exhibitions.** Case studies evidence the success/popularity of an exhibition by listing other institutions who procured it after its initial showing.

- **External Reviews/Awards.** Case studies evidence the impact a collaborative project has had by referencing reviews from external bodies such as newspapers, or awards which it has won.
- **Sales Totals/Figures.** Case studies detail the money raised through an exhibition or product which an academic help produce.
- **Staff Testimonials.** Case studies evidence the impact a project has had by using testimonials for staff members who they worked with.
- **Visitor/User Numbers.** Instances when case studies give the total number of people who attended an exhibition they attended, or a talk they gave. Also used to define case studies which list the number of people who downloaded/viewed/interacted with a digital product which they helped produce.
- **Visitor Studies.** Museum analysis of how visitors interacted and engaged with products and exhibitions, for instance how long they spent viewing a particular exhibit or exhibition.
- **Visitor Reviews/Surveys.** Case studies detail reviews and comments given by people who attended/viewed/interacted with an exhibition, talk or product which they were involved with. This can also include statistics resulting from visitor surveys.

### Results/Observations

Of the 237 case studies, 165 provided evidence for the impacts/benefits of their collaboration with museums, and 72 did not. 45 of these case studies were ones which were defined as having ‘limited’ amounts of museum-university collaboration, such as an academic giving a one off talk on their research at a museum. In instances such as these, case studies would typically describe their partnerships with museums as being a part of a much wider set of public engagement activities, and as such were less likely to detail the impact which resulted from their collaboration with a particular institution.

A breakdown of the types of evidence which were provided are listed below.



The most common way in which case studies evidence impact is through detailing the number of people who visited or engaged with the activity/products developed through the collaboration. Such figures help demonstrate the ‘reach’ of the activity, but little about its ‘significance’ (for instance, how it change those who attended or interacted).

Evidence for this is sometimes provided using testimonials from museum staff, the second most common category of evidence cited. Testimonials also provide a very effective means by which case studies can evidence that their collaborations impacted on and benefited members of a museum.

*‘As confirmed by the Head of Collections and Exhibitions at the Geffrye Museum, ‘Amongst the many exhibitions I have been involved in, this has been one of the most effective in taking scholarly research and making it truly accessible and engaging to a wide range of visitors, while also leaving a legacy for the future in terms of enhancing our practice.’*

CS 15531, ‘Challenging Cultural Stereotypes’, 3-4

*‘The museum’s head of research writes, ‘There has been a long standing co-operation between Dr Arnold-de Simine and the GDR Museum Berlin. ... A major change was that apart from the everyday we now also provide more information on the political structures and the economy of the GDR as well as the oppression by the state and opposition to it. ...’*

CS 19565, ‘Mediating memory in a museum’, 3

External and visitor reviews, as well as visitor studies, all provide an effective means of evidencing how collaborations impacted on and engaged the audiences who attended and interacted with them. 68 case studies drew on at least one of these types of evidence – but it is striking that relatively little use was made of robust evaluation data or studies.

Whilst case studies often listed types of digital output which resulted from collaborations, such as podcasts, recorded lectures and YouTube videos, they often failed to evidence the impact which these had other than the number of people who viewed or interacted with them. By contrast, case studies which focus on exhibitions held by museums are much more likely to evidence the reactions and views of those who interacted with them. These are gathered from a number of sources - not only visitor and external reviews, but also the blogs of people who attended them.

*‘Feedback on the exhibition (on independent blogs) shows that it had encouraged visitors to think anew about their experiences of the Sublime...: ‘this synoptic hang whose sole common denominator is the sublime as announced by the organizers provides the chance to retrieve certain forgotten paintings ‘previously considered devoid of interest.’*

CS 32225, ‘Curating, Creating and Comprehending’, 3

*‘The visitor survey and other forms of media such as online blogs offer an indication of how the exhibition gave the public new insights into Persian culture; one visitor noted in a blog, that he was ‘surprised by the clarity of certain illustrations, and how ideas and stories were conveyed so effectively even with a taste a thousand years old’.*

CS 17095, ‘The arts of the book in Persian culture’, 3

## **5. Benefits for Academics**

REF case studies also provide evidence of how museum-university collaborations benefit the academics who are involved with them. We identified the following benefits:

- **Apply Research.** For academics whose research focusses on museum practice and collections, collaborative projects provide an excellent means of ensuring their research influences and informs museum practice.

*‘Arnold-de Simine’s analysis has allowed her to engage and intervene critically in new developments in museological paradigms and in the practical implementation of memory theories in museums, drawing attention to the tensions and contradictions within them.’*

CS 19565, 'Mediating memory in the museum', 1

- **Engage non-academic audiences with research.** Curating exhibitions, speaking at museum events, and producing resources and products in partnership with museums, are all examples of how collaborations can help academics to engage non-academic audiences with their research.

*'Visitor feedback demonstrates how the exhibition changed public understanding of Gladstone's early (neglected) political career and his life in Nottinghamshire.'*

CS 30036, 'The commemoration and preservation of local heritage', 3

- **Raise an Academic's Profile.** Working on projects with museums is a means by which academics achieve exposure and raise their public profile. This is particularly true of projects which see academics working on large-scale projects and exhibitions which receive widespread media attention.

*'Topp's research on architectural and design modernism and psychiatric institutions prompted much favourable and detailed comment from journalists and from professionals in these fields...Museums Journal interviewed Topp and quoted her extensively for an article on innovative approaches in guest-curated exhibitions.'*

CS 18058, 'Madness and Modernity', 3

- **Support academic research.** Working alongside museum staff can contribute to and develop the research being undertaken by an academic. Collaborative projects with museums can also unlock sources of funding which enable academics to undertake large-scale research projects.

*'Jones' research has involved further sustained collaboration with Historic Scotland, as well as work with the National Museums of Scotland, the Nova Scotia Highland Village Museum, and most recently the National Trust for Scotland. Discussions with professionals in these organisations both frame the research and provide a mechanism for discussion of the results and implications.'*

CS 28105, 'Social significance and authenticity in heritage conservation', 3

- **Support large-scale public engagement projects.** The holdings of museums, and the expertise of their staff, are often integral to large-scale university run public engagement projects. These projects will typically not just take place within museums, but look to create resources and opportunities which can benefit local, regional and even national communities.

*'The University of Reading's Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project (H-ADP) resulted in the development of a free electronic archive and website ([www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk](http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk)) concerning the single most important collection of papers on English theatre history and performance in the Shakespearean era.'*

CS 36381, 'Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project', 1

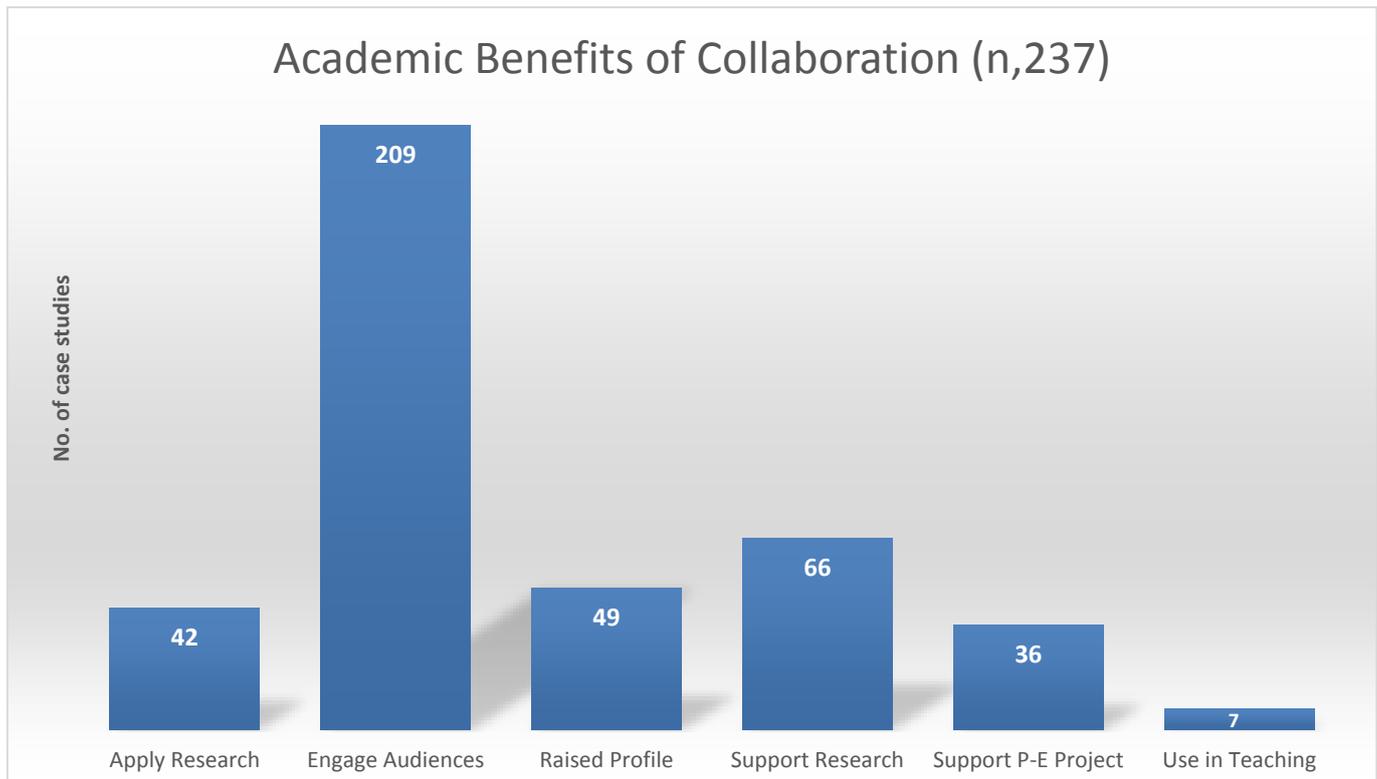
- **Use in Teaching/Modules.** REF case studies highlight how academics and universities might look to involve their students in collaborative projects with universities. This both enables academics to create innovative modules which give their students real-world experience, which can also enhance their employability. Partnerships with museums can also open up opportunities to post-graduates to undertake research projects with their collections.

*'Todman has extended his contribution to the future experiences of visitors to the IWM's exhibition by leading the development at Queen Mary, with final year undergraduates on his modules, of a smartphone app which will prepare visitors for their trip by delivering information about the wartime experiences of servicemen and their families from the streets they pass as they walk from local underground stations to the Museum.'*

CS 17499, 'Exhibiting the Past', 4

## Results/Observations

The graph below shows the distribution of case studies according to the different types of benefits they evidence for the academics who were involved in them.



The primary benefit of museum-university collaborations to academics were the opportunities they afforded them to disseminate their research, and engage a range of audiences with it. The data also evidences how partnerships with museums can benefit and support academic research, with sixty-six case studies falling into the 'support research' category. The focus of REF case studies is to demonstrate impact 'beyond academia' so it is much rarer for them to do as the one below does, and recognise the reverse relationship:

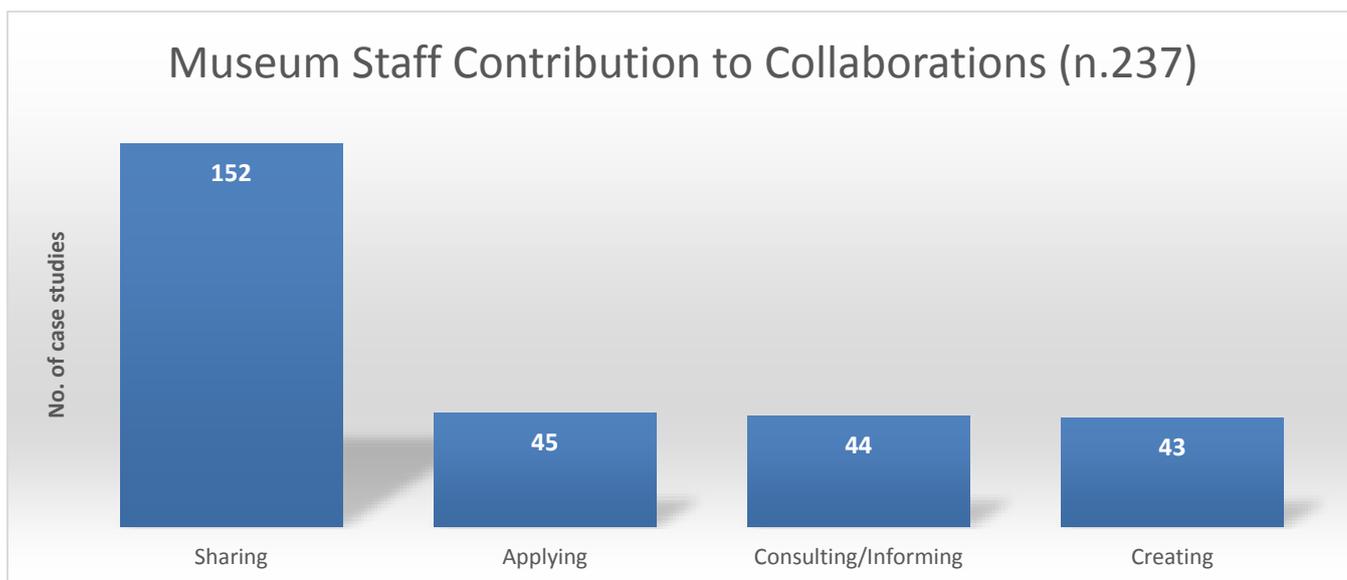
*'Shaw's research conceptually underpinned the project, helping to shape the ideas of artists, Tate visitors (in person and online), and curators. His thinking for pieces commissioned by the project was, in turn, shaped by this dialogue, demonstrating the enrichment of research via its initial impact.'*

CS 32225, 'Curating, Creating and Comprehending', 1

To further explore the relationship between academics and museum staff, we coded four main ways in which museum staff typically contribute to research collaborations:

- **Sharing.** Museum staff support the processes by which academic research and expertise is disseminated and used to engage a wider public.
- **Applying.** Museum staff ensure that academic research and approaches feed into their own areas of practice.
- **Consulting/Informing.** The expertise and knowledge of museum staff feeds into and helps develop an academic's research and wider skillsets.
- **Creating.** Museum staff are joint partners in shared research projects with academics. They are actively involved in the process of creating knowledge, as well as the products and resources which help share and disseminate it.

The number of case studies which came under these different headings is shown below.



That the most common contribution of museum staff to collaborations was 'sharing' corresponds to the earlier observation that 'dissemination of research' tends to dominate the sample. Of course, the purpose of the impact assessment exercise means that the case studies will not always detail when museum staff consulted academics and supported their research and wider professional development.

However, combined with testimonies from the case studies themselves, the sample does highlight the potential which museum-university collaborations have for not only sharing knowledge, but also creating and developing it. This not only includes more 'traditional' approaches, such as joint research projects which result in exhibitions and catalogues, but also ones which are more heavily focussed around digital products and resources. For example, a number of case studies describe projects in which universities have collaborated with one or a number of institutions, to create digitised catalogues of their holdings, which can subsequently be made available online. Digitising and cataloguing the collections of different institutions not only supports academic research - it also creates a resource which can support the outreach and engagement programmes of museums, as well as their wider curatorial work. Unlike exhibitions, digitised collections freely available online can reach much wider audiences, and unlike exhibition catalogues, are much cheaper to access.

*'The project has established a new and growing online archive...that curates and contextualises digitised holdings in partnership with, amongst others, St Andrews Museum, the British Film Institute and the Media History Digital Library. The online archive includes materials such as photographs, architectural plans, local interviews, and newspaper clippings, all available open access. As the editor of local magazine St Andrews in Focus explains, the project's outreach activities, and in particular its online archive of local history, has done 'a great service in preserving and promoting the town's film heritage at a time when St Andrews and Scotland's creative industries are under increasing threat'.*

CS 35322, 'Cinema St Andrews', 3

*'Hamling acted as research consultant for 'Eye Shakespeare', an innovative new iPhone application launched in 2012. The app makes artefacts held by the SBT available to users in digital form and includes in the second version an augmented reality 3D computer model of Shakespeare's lost house at New Place.'*

CS 38897, 'Communicating the Material Culture', 3

Finally, it is worth noting that a relatively large number of case studies, just under fifty, detailed how collaborations had helped raise the public profile of academics who were involved. Taken alongside discussions from the previous

section, which highlighted the income which museums can generate through partnerships, this demonstrates the wider benefits which can accrue to both sides in successful museum-university partnerships.

## 6. Museum Types

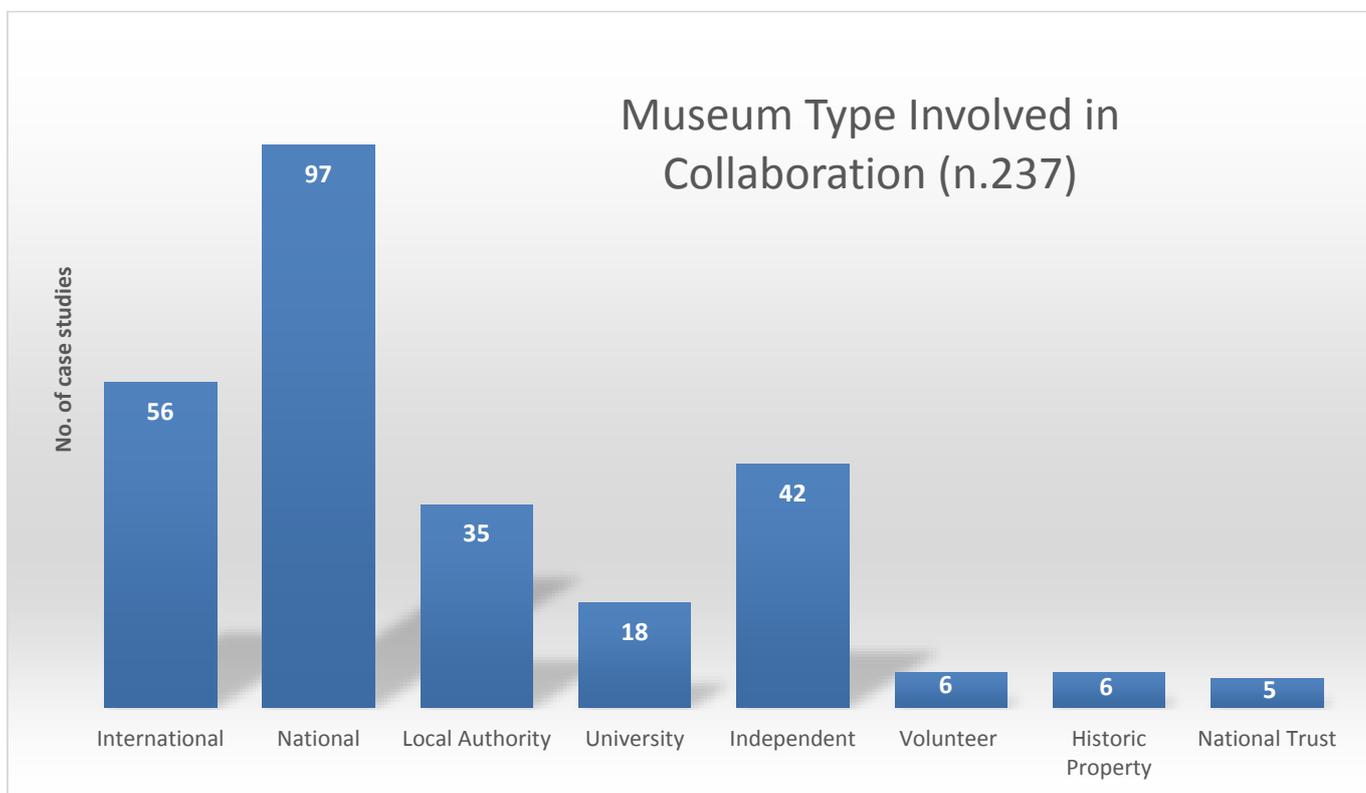
We have also sought to code the types of museums which universities enter into collaborations with in the case study sample, and also their sizes. When categorising museums, we drew on the model provided by the Museums Association (available at: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/about/frequently-asked-questions>), which outlines the following museum types:

- **National Museums.** Run and funded by central government, generally hold larger collections that are considered to be of national importance.
- **Local Authority Museums.** Owned and run by local authority bodies e.g. town/city/county councils. Generally house collections that reflect local history and heritage
- **University Museums.** Owned and managed by universities
- **Independent Museums.** Owned by registered charities and other independent bodies or trusts.
- **Historic Properties and Heritage Sites.** Buildings, monuments and sites of historic interest, many of which also house collections. Are managed by non-departmental bodies e.g. English Heritage
- **National Trust Properties.** Similar to English Heritage sites, but are owned and run by the NT.

A seventh type of museum not included in the list but which often features in case studies, is **International Museums**. We also included a category for **Volunteer Museums**.

### Results/Observations

The number of case studies which involved university collaboration with specific museum types, is visualised below. Sometimes more than one type of museum was described in a case study.

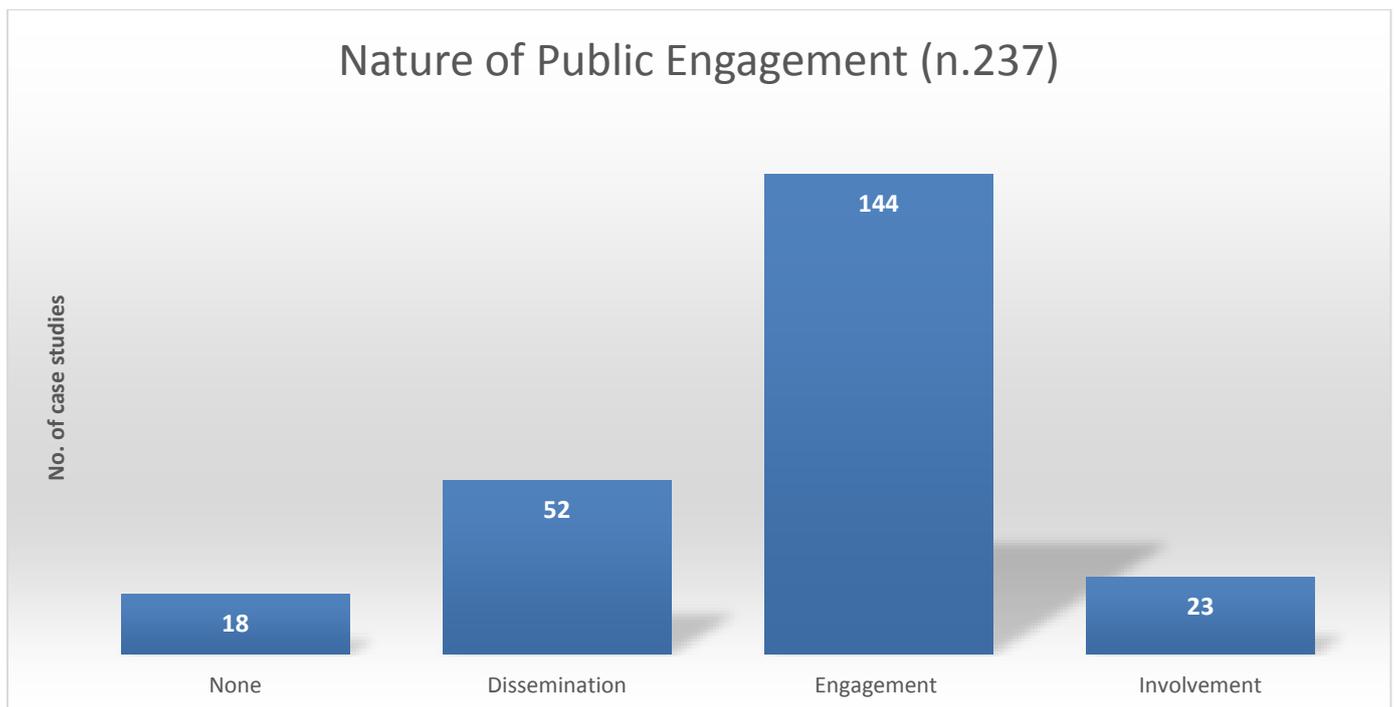


## 7. Public engagement

Finally, we reviewed the sample to identify what types / purposes of public engagement featured. Over 90% of the sample involved some public engagement. We categorised the public engagement as:

- **Dissemination** – ‘*awareness*’: maximising the reach of the research through dissemination and communication
- **Engagement** – ‘*meaningful encounters*’: creating meaningful and significant encounters with the research, tuned to the specific needs and interests of the public
- **Involvement** – ‘*contributing*’: involving the public in shaping and influencing the research so that their expertise / insights inform the outputs

It was encouraging to see that in over 70% of the case studies the engagement with the public was more than simply dissemination, and involved them in meaningful and significant encounters with the research.



## Conclusion

The REF case studies provide a rich source of evidence to explore the dynamics of museum-university partnership working, although they are clearly heavily skewed to representing the interests of universities, given their purpose in the assessment of research excellence.

While the review demonstrates a relatively healthy amount of interaction and engagement between museums and universities, it reveals a number of limitations to the scope of the partnership work being reported. Several areas seem particularly striking and present genuinely important opportunities for the MUPI project to address in future activity:

Opportunity	Implications for the MUPI project/possible response
<p><b>Broadening the discipline base</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Arts and Humanities dominate the sample (with nearly 40% of all the case studies submitted in this area involving museums. In stark contrast, only 2% of those in medical sciences; 5% in physical sciences and engineering and 6.6% in social sciences feature museums).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create opportunities for academics working in currently under-represented subject areas to network with museum colleagues to generate project ideas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opening up collaborations in a broader range of museum practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity is currently heavily skewed to traditional and familiar areas of museum practice – e.g. exhibitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage academics and museum staff to explore the potential of collaboration in other areas of museum practice (e.g. business development)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Shifting collaboration ‘upstream’</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In many cases academics only contact museums when they have results to disseminate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create opportunities for academics and museum staff to meet and develop new, collaborative projects with active museum involvement; or which are led by the museum</li> </ul>
<p><b>Targeting small museums</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very few small museums feature in the sample.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively target small museums and provide opportunities for them to begin to build links to academics, and ensure small amounts of resource are available to fund their time</li> </ul>
<p><b>Broadening and deepening the approach to impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A relatively narrow range of impacts are being claimed/realised – heavily skewed to informal learning and communication.</li> <li>The quality of evidence and evaluation being cited is often poor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage collaborations that address a broader range of potential outcomes (e.g. commercial activity)</li> <li>Find better ways to exploit museum expertise in evaluation</li> </ul>

## Appendix: The REF assessment process

The four UK higher education funding bodies allocate about £2 billion per year of research funding to UK universities. To distribute funds selectively on the basis of quality, the funding bodies assess universities' research through a periodic exercise. This was previously known as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and was last conducted in 2008. The 2014 REF replaced the RAE. It assessed the quality and impact of UK universities' research in all disciplines.

The assessment is carried out in 36 subject-based units of assessment, clustered into four main panels.

Panel A	<b>Medical sciences and health</b> Clinical Medicine; Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care; Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy; Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience; Biological Sciences; Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science
Panel B	<b>Physical sciences and engineering</b> Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences; Chemistry; Physics; Mathematical Sciences; Computer Science and Informatics; Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering; Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Metallurgy and Materials; Civil and Construction Engineering; General Engineering
Panel C	<b>Social Sciences</b> Architecture, Built Environment and Planning; Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology; Economics and Econometrics; Business and Management Studies; Law; Politics and International Studies; Social Work and Social Policy; Sociology; Anthropology and Development Studies; Education; Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
Panel D	<b>Arts and humanities</b> Area Studies; Modern Languages and Linguistics; English Language and Literature; History; Classics; Philosophy; Theology and Religious Studies; Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory; Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts; Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

### The process<sup>3</sup>

- **Preparation** (2011-12): The UK funding bodies appointed the REF expert panels, consulted the sector and published the criteria and guidelines for the exercise.
- **Submissions** (2012-2013): Each institution decided which UOAs to submit in, and prepared their submissions. Submissions were made by 29 November 2013.
- **Assessment** (2014): Expert panels – comprising 898 academics and 259 research users – reviewed the submissions. The results were published on 18 December 2014.

The following was assessed:

- **Research outputs:** 'Outputs' are the product of any form of research, published between January 2008 and December 2013. They include publications such as journal articles, monographs and chapters in books, as well as outputs disseminated in other ways such as designs, performances and exhibitions. Universities submitted up to four outputs for each member of staff they selected for inclusion in their submissions. Outputs formed 65% of the overall result.
- **Research impact:** 'Impact' was defined as any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia. Impact was assessed for its 'reach' and 'significance', using a case study approach ('impact case studies'). These four-page documents described impacts that had occurred between January 2008 and July 2013. The submitting

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/keyfacts/>

university must have produced high quality research since 1993 that contributed to the impacts. Each submission included one case study, plus an additional case study for every 10 staff. An impact template as also required for each Unit of Assessment (UoA). This document explained how the submitted unit had enabled impact from its research during the period from 2008 to 2013, and its future strategy for impact. Impact formed 20% of the overall result.

- **Research environment:** 'Environment' refers to the strategy, resources and infrastructure that support research. This was assessed using statistical data and an environment template. This document describes the submitted unit's research strategy; its support for research staff and students; its research income, infrastructure and facilities; and its research collaborations and wider contributions to the discipline. Environment formed 15% of the overall result.