

**Report: Contextual Wrappers 2 University Museums Group conference 'Consultation Session',
Great North Museum, 2.30-3.15pm, 7th Feb 2012**

Introduction:

As part of its consultation and dissemination and engagement activities, the Contextual Wrappers 2 project consulted with a range of University Museum professionals through a roundtable Q&A session as part of the UMG conference.

Attendees:

- Helen Armstrong - Collections Manager in the Museums, Durham University
- Kate Carreno - Assistant Director, Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge
- Prof Eric Cross - Dean of Cultural Affairs, Newcastle University
- Jo Elsworth, Director, Theatre Collection, University of Bristol,
- Carolyn Graves-Brown, Curator – University of Swansea, Egypt Centre
- Dr Catherine Moriarty - Curatorial Director of the University of Brighton Design Archives and Principal Research Fellow in the Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton
- Dr Amy Smith - Senior Lecturer and Curator, Ure Museum, University of Reading

For CW2: Phill Purdy & Katie Smith – Collections Trust

Q&A roundtable:

- What do you think are the main uses and value of 'collection records' for University Museums, especially for finding things online (i.e. 'resource discovery')?

- They are useful for finding things online, but it can be difficult depending on how many collection records you have and how collections are 'split'. They can also be resource intensive to create.
- Collection records will give a way of accessing parts of collections that have not been properly documented [at item level] – might fit into the new accreditation standard re bulk accessioning.
- Voiced a concern that it can be hard to make academics interdisciplinary – don't necessarily want to put searches into 'subject-silos'.
- Looked at how the Archives sector uses collection records to good effect, but this could be because often their records are more clearly defined by specific collections already e.g. 'The Mander & Mitchenson Collection'. This might be difficult to apply to museum collections as they are often not so 'structurally' defined.
- Some University libraries (Durham) are adopting a resource discovery system, is there a way that the museum collections could be part of this?
- Does the term 'collections' mean much outside museum world?
- Collection records may be good for 'directing enquiries' (which may lead to issues to deal with those enquiries.)
- Names, dates and places work well at collection-level

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Summary finding: *Both positive and negative issues with collection records were raised indicating that the jury is still out re their use for resource discovery of University Museum content. A primary concern was to balance resources for collection-record management with the value in their use and find a way to embed the management and use of collection records within the standards and practices of University Museums.*

- What's the most important thing you'd want from a 'UK University Museum search/'portal' and who should it mainly be for?

- Depends on the audience – HE audiences might want it to be across a range of collections, not just from UM's, but UM staff would be interested in searching other collections
- Useful for it to provide a 'way in' for each kind of audience e.g. HE researcher / expert curator and casual visitor to see 'what is down the road'
- Issues raised re the need for a University Museums focused search/portal
- A University Museum-only search would work well for advocacy & promotion of the University Museum sector.
- Should provide 'seamless' access to other material i.e. from outside University Museums, as well as from within
- Would need to be able to report on usage including tracking searches back to University Museum web-sites/services.
- The ability to tag records for finding them online was seen as an important feature.

Summary finding: *The need to cater for multiple audiences / uses and to ensure access to information from outside University Museums was very prominent, even to the extent of questioning the need for a University Museum branded access point, beyond its advocacy value.*

- How could 'research data' (e.g. from the JISC funded Open Book or Cutting Edge projects, led by Fitzwilliam Museum and University of Newcastle respectively) align with collection-records or within a cross-University Museums search in the future?

- Can be hard enough getting such records onto local systems let alone anything else.
- Would be very useful if services such as Culture Grid could create tools for associating research data with other collections information e.g. so other people can create links between records e.g. through tagging, but would need to make sure there is quality control over the tagging.
- Confidentiality can be an issue if some information can't be shared e.g. personal or sensitive data held within UM collections based Thesis.
- Ability to attribute and cite sources of data would be required.

Summary Finding: *As well as the realities of implementation being indicated, there was a great deal of interest and enthusiasm expressed for the effective joining up of research data with other kinds of collections information in the future, (not an aim for the current project, but a useful indicator of future demand in this area.)*