

**Concept**

Strong cultural-academic partnerships can work to the mutual benefit of partners such as museums and universities. This has already been demonstrated through such schemes as the Beacons for Public Engagement programme (2008-2012), where all six Beacon universities included a museum in their partnership consortium<sup>1</sup>. The case studies and learning produced under the Beacon programme will be the starting point for this project<sup>2</sup>.

Universities in London can offer expertise in a wide range of subjects, from conservation and curating to business innovation and new technologies, and are good at ‘managed risk taking’. They also offer in-depth knowledge in disciplines such as science and geology, which many museums lack. More generally, partnership with a university can offer museums access to theoretical frameworks for their activity, and the benefit of critical thinking informed by global research.

Museums, for their part, often have deep experience of community engagement and audience interaction. They hold unique resources in their collections and archives, and can offer universities highly creative and dramatic environments for learning and public engagement, and opportunities for students to participate in museum life.

The reciprocal benefits of working together can be summarised as follows:

Universities offer museums	Museums offer universities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Subject expertise, research frameworks, training opportunities</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Audience and public engagement expertise</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Business innovation</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interpretation skills</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Funding opportunities</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Potential for research impact, and impact funding</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Student contribution to knowledge exchange</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Placements to improve student employability</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International partnerships</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community and public sector partnerships</b></li> </ul>

Despite this, universities and museums – particularly small museums – rarely work together. We think it likely that the reasons for this include: a mutual lack of awareness of the benefits; a difference in the languages used by the two communities; different timetables and planning horizons and – on the museum side – a lack of confidence and capacity to develop relationships. As a result, the nature of the relationships that are possible and the elements that make for successful collaborations have not yet been fully explored.

The need for a form of brokering has perhaps never been more acute, at a time when public sector funding cuts mean that many museums are losing access to specialist expertise, and when the university sector is under intense pressure to ensure that research has public support and public impact. The introduction of higher student fees has also increased the imperative to link academic courses to practical work placements to increase student employability.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about/beacons>. UCL was one of the six Beacon universities and has gained considerable learning in public engagement from this programme.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/museums-researchers-and-engagement-report> and <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/case-studies>

## SHARE Academy: a proposal

### Partners

The partners in this project are as follows:

- UCL is a leading research-led, multi-disciplinary university, ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the world. A network of academics working across disciplines as diverse as Sustainable Heritage, Computer Science, Engineering, Anthropology, Architecture, Archaeology and the Digital Humanities is in the process of being formed.
- University of the Arts London (UAL) is the largest arts and design university in the UK, delivering a range of courses from Conservation and Curating to Communication Design and Innovation Management across six colleges.
- London Museums Group (LMG) was established in 2006 and is the federation for the London region, representing some 250 museums across the capital. LMG runs SHARE London, a self-sustaining skills and resources sharing forum, managed via the LMG website.

We know from experience that university museums can act as bridges between universities and the museums sector. As both UCL and UAL have accredited museums they are uniquely placed to act as brokers. We will establish a SHARE Academy steering group which will include the Director of Museums and Public Engagement at UCL and the Head of Museums at Central St Martins, UAL, who is also currently Chair of LMG.

### Aims and activities

The aims of project are to:

- Demonstrate the extent to which capacity and resilience within London's specialist museums can be built by connecting them with sources of expertise
- Channel additional resources into London's specialist museums
- Bring public engagement benefits for universities
- Build on the success of London Museums Group's SHARE London scheme

We will do this by undertaking a number of related activities:

- Identify the needs for academic support among London's specialist museums
- Identify potential projects and partners within UCL and UAL
- Broker relationships between museums and academics with a view to creating a small group of pilot projects focusing on key issues such as new technologies, sustainable business models and placements, including
  - Trialling the use of student volunteers and placements to help museums meet key strategic goals, and in turn generate employability and provide opportunities for gaining transferable skills by students
  - Identifying preliminary research projects with complementary academic and museum themes and testing one of these as a pilot
- Create a sustainable SHARE Academy section on the LMG website, to host the new network and publish project resources including case studies, evaluation, 'how to' guidance and the project report
- Hosting a symposium for wider museum and academic networks to explore potential for development
- Make recommendations for next steps

### Outputs

- Sustainable SHARE Academy web pages, hosting the new network
- Online SHARE Academy resources including pilot case studies, 'how to' guidance for museums and universities, and the project report
- A group of pilot projects – with sustainability and resilience at the core - that will each have a legacy for the HEI and the museum involved
- A symposium for museum and academic partners
- A report and framework that others can use

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation will be integrated into the programme, in particular into developing tools to communicate the possibilities across the two groups/ languages, and in developing mechanisms or approaches to make the contact time effective for partners. The evaluation will include impact analysis of the sample project; to quantify impact – positive and negative – and capture lessons. This is likely to include surveying partners and possibly participants. The pilot will be written up as a case study to serve as an advocacy tool.