

## UCL Public Engagement Beacon Bursary: Project Evaluation & Learning Form

The project evaluation and learning form aims to provide a simple way to document what the project has done and achieved. Projects are asked to reflect on their experience, explain any problems they had, summarise what they have learned, and lessons they would pass on to other projects or can be applied elsewhere. Although a template is provided, the nature and scope of the form will depend on the project undertaken.

Projects should submit a complete project evaluation and learning form no later than **one month** after the project end date.

The form will be reviewed by the UCL Public Engagement Unit and summarised to the Steering Group. As we are keen to share experiences of public engagement, completed sections of the form (with approval from the author) will be used to develop UCL public engagement case studies which will be published on the UCL website.

### Background:

<b>Name</b>	Jayne Dunn, Subhadra Das
<b>Job Title/Course</b>	Exhibition curators
<b>Organisation/Department</b>	UCL Museums & Collections
<b>Project name</b>	<i>Disposal?</i>
<b>Total project value (£)</b>	Cf. Sally MacDonald
<b>Beacon funding (£)</b>	£1,500
<b>Funding breakdown</b> <i>Please note the the project actual spend, broken down into specific costs</i>	
<b>Location</b>	Structures Lab, UCL Geomatic, Civil and Environmental Engineering Department, Chadwick Building
<b>Start and end dates</b>	Monday 19 <sup>th</sup> – Saturday 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2009
<b>Project partners</b> <i>(Please list the partners involved in the project, include names, organisations and contact details where possible).</i>	Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT)

### Summary of project / activity: What happened?

*Disposal?* was an interactive exhibition designed to consult with our audience – UCL staff and students and the general public – about UCL Museums & Collections about what we should keep and what we should get rid of.

**Who was the audience for this project?** *Please give details.*

We designed the exhibition for the people for whom we at UCL Museums & Collection hold our collections in trust:

- UCL staff and students
- The general public including visitors to the museums and tourists
- People who live in the local areas of Camden and Bloomsbury

We also knew that the controversial nature of the topic would be of interest to our colleagues in the museum sector.

**What was the project supposed to accomplish?** *Please outline the aims and objectives agreed at the start of project, note if they changed during the project and the process and reasons for making those changes.*

By putting on *Disposal?* we wanted to

- Have a discussion with our audience about how they saw the role of UCL Museums & Collections and what they felt it was important for us to keep and also what they thought we should dispose of.
- Learn what criteria people applied when making decisions about what should stay and what should go
- Give the people for whom this material is held in trust a voice in how it is managed. Comments from the discussion board and ongoing discussions online will inform our acquisition and disposal policies, e.g. collections profiles and earmarking individual objects for disposal.

**Did the project succeed in its aims? How do you know?** *Specifically, please outline any evaluation and assessment undertaken.*

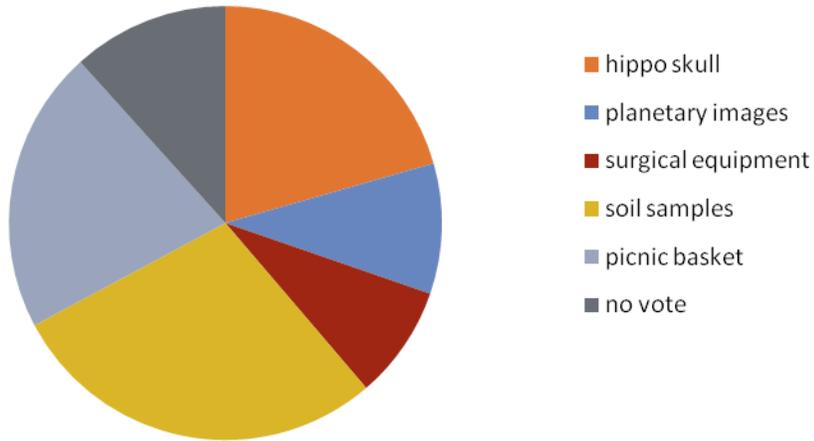
We evaluated this project in two main areas:

### **1. Collections and disposal**

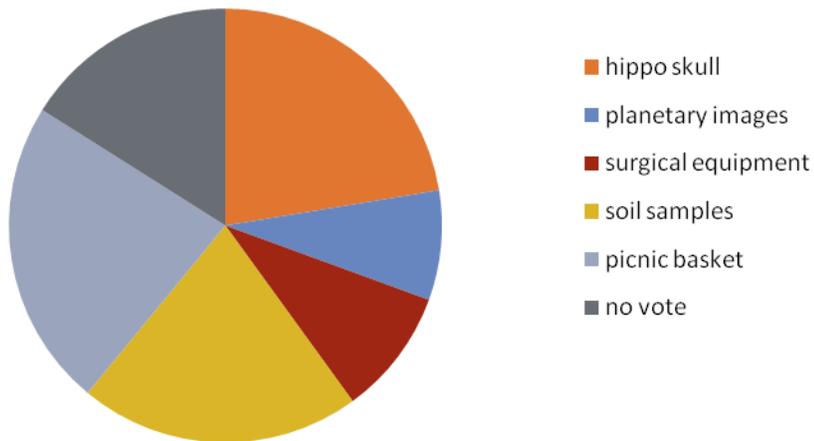
The main purpose of the exhibition was to have discussion about how museums should work and for us as people who work in museums to understand how our public view the collections and the work we do. To this end, evaluation was built in to the whole format of the exhibition. This included

- A voting system, where we asked visitors to vote on which one of 5 objects they would dispose of if they were a museum curator. Visitors voted at the beginning of their visit and again at the end, once they had had a chance to look around the exhibition. By tracking individual votes we will be able to see what criteria people used to make their decision and also whether they changed their minds.

### 1st Vote



### 2nd Vote

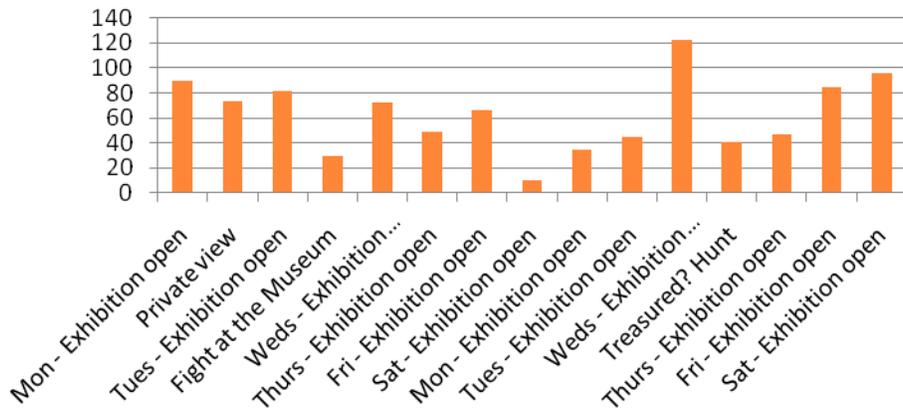


- An evaluation form. The form asked questions about the meaning of disposal, their criteria for making decisions about what to keep and what to get rid of, and whether or not they thought disposal was something that museums should be doing. 90 completed forms were collected, giving us a return rate of 10%.

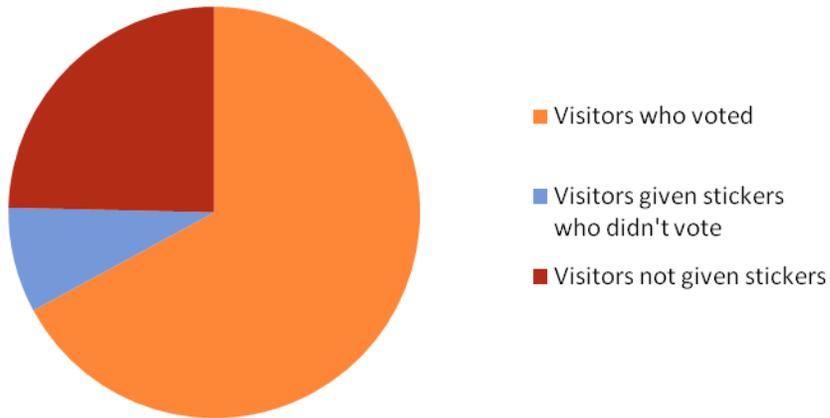
## 2. Audiences and marketing

We wanted to include as many people as we possibly could in this discussion. To determine how well we had managed to do this, we asked as many visitors as we could whether they were a member of UCL (staff or student), the general public or the professional museum sector. We also asked them how they heard about us.

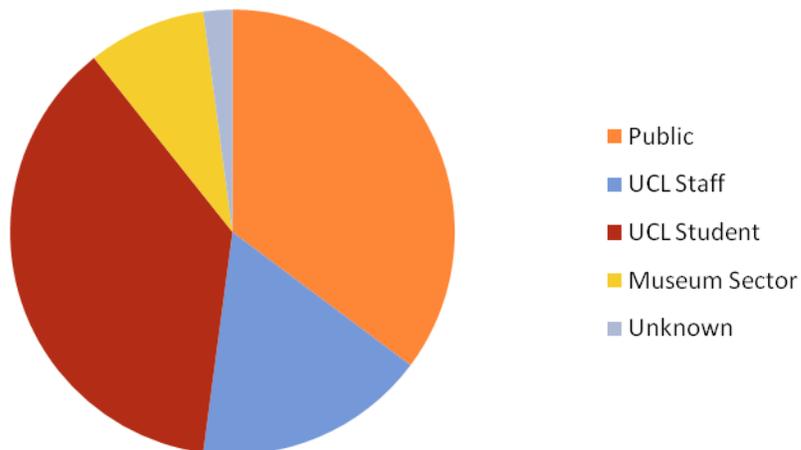
## Visitor Attendance



## Visitor Voting



## Voting Demographics



**What things do you think worked well and why?** *When filling in this section, please try to think about all aspects of the project (e.g. initial inception, project activities and project outcomes), from a range of perspectives.*

- **Exhibition attendants** – Having the exhibition manned by informed and friendly staff had a significant impact on visitor participation. Of the 942 people who visited the exhibition, 710 took part in the voting exercise. Without the exhibition staff, this level of participation would never have been achieved and we would not have been able to gather this volume of data.
- **The voting system** – By encouraging visitors to vote we were able to engage them at a more meaningful level than in a conventional museum exhibition. The data captured by this system is easy to interpret and will help us to answer a wide range of questions about our audience and their views on disposal.
- **Working space** – Holding the exhibition in a working space created a good vibe and helped to establish a relationship in a department which had little previous interaction with UCL Museums & Collections. The central location combined with the *Object Retrieval* project put UCL Museums & Collections at the centre of public interaction at the heart of UCL.
- **Media coverage** – We had known that the topic of the exhibition was controversial and that this may make it media-friendly, but the coverage we received surpassed all expectations. We began well with articles in the *Guardian* and on the *New Scientist* website. These were picked up by other papers, magazines and radio stations nationally and internationally. These include: the *Saturday Times*, 'As it happens (Canadian Broadcasting Company),' Radio Free Europe, *Time*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The National* (newspaper in the UAE), and *The Art Newspaper*.

**What issues emerged during the project and how were they tackled?** *Specifically, what barriers did you face and how did you overcome them? Again, please try to think about all aspects of the project, from a range of perspectives.*

- **Health & Safety** – Despite having filled in all the appropriate paperwork in advance, there were two occasions when the UCL Health & Safety department impeded the installation of the exhibition. Firstly, our exhibition coordinator was not allowed to drive a hired Genie lift, and secondly the inclusion of a radioactive mineral sample was a cause of concern.
- **Internal procedures** – The lack of an appropriate infrastructure for dealing with internal exhibitions (*Disposal?* was the first inter-collections exhibition to be put on by UCL Museums & Collections) combined with poor communication on both sides, made project management an uphill battle.

- **University space** – Although it did create a vibrant atmosphere for the exhibition, locating the exhibition in a working university space meant that we had to invest a lot of time in liaising with the department to ensure everything ran smoothly. It also meant that despite our best efforts, the installation, running and de-installation of the exhibition was inevitably disruptive to teaching.

**Looking back, what things do you'd wished you had known when the project started?** *Please list anything you feel would have been helpful to know at the start which could have made the project easier.*

- That it is important to keep up marketing even after the exhibition opens and that media coverage does not necessarily translate into actual footfall. We were advised to focus our marketing on local community groups, but rested on our laurels because of the good media uptake.
- That exhibition was as popular as it was – given the amount of work that went into it – including purpose-built furniture and bespoke graphics – we would have kept it open for longer.
- Not to bother opening on a Saturday. The college and surrounding area was a virtual ghost town and the people who did happen to walk by were going elsewhere. We attempted to poach attendees at a nearby conference, but only managed to attract two out of the approximately 200 people there.

**Has the project led to any new activity or relationships?** *For example has the project led to any changes within the department or any changes in teaching or research? Please give details.*

- Following the success of the exhibition, we plan to develop an online version including a virtual exhibition and notice board. The goal is to carry on the discussions and conversations begun during *Disposal?* and continue to interact with people to give them a voice in the management of their collections.
- We developed a positive relationship with the media (esp. *New Scientist*) which we intend to pursue, particularly in terms of the transparent management of our collections and what we acquire and dispose of. This may also be a way to publicize the collections to new audiences outside the university.
- Teaching relationship with Kingston University Museums Studies course and the Camberwell College of Arts Conservation course. There are plans to develop a teaching course with Kingston University using UCL Museums & Collections objects.

**Which of the Beacon Aim(s) did it address?** *The aims for the Beacon for Public Engagement Programme are as follows:*

Create a <b>culture</b> within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is <b>formalised</b> and <b>embedded</b> as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students	✓
Build <b>capacity</b> for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved	✓
Ensure HEIs address public engagement within their <b>strategic plans</b> and that this is cascaded to departmental level	
Create <b>networks</b> within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise	✓
Enable HEIs to test <b>different methods</b> of supporting public engagement and to share learning	✓

**Specifically, how does the project addresses these aims?**

#### **Formalised and embedded culture of public engagement**

The format of *Disposal?* depended on audience participation to be successful. We have consulted and will continue to consult with the public in order to inform UCL's acquisition and disposal policies in general and on individual objects in particular.

We also hope the problems we experienced will be impetus for the organization to change and develop an appropriate infrastructure to make holding internally managed cross-collections exhibitions and events like this easier to run in the future

#### **Building capacity for public engagement**

*Disposal?* made use of a dormant university space as a forum for public engagement. By doing this we have demonstrated the potential for such spaces to be used for other exhibitions and interactions, and we hope that this is a precedent for future work, not just a one-off event.

#### **Networks**

We established a relationship with the Civil, Geomatic and Environmental Engineering Department could lead to collaboration on future exhibitions.

#### **Different methods and shared learning**

*Disposal?* (and the forthcoming associated website) pioneered a consultative exhibition methodology and depended on public interaction for success.

We plan to work as consultants to other museums – including university museums – to develop similar exhibitions of their own. We will publish articles on the exhibition and its evaluation to share our own experiences with our colleagues in the museum sector.

**More information:** *Please attach photographs of what happened, if you have one. Please also list any titles or links to more information on the project (for example reports, articles, websites).*

An online portfolio of images of the collections can be found at:

[www.richardhs.com/photos/disposal\\_301009](http://www.richardhs.com/photos/disposal_301009)

The following are links to formal and informal media which reported or commented on the exhibition:

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0910/09100106>

<http://www.ee.ucl.ac.uk/about/disposal>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/oct/19/ucl-disposal-exhibition-agatha-christie>

<http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091026/LIFE/710259972/1111/rs>

[S](#)

<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Disposing-of-cultural-artefacts-in-university-collections%20/19622>

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/careers>

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1936768,00.html>