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Evidencing the Impact and Value of Special Collections
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unique and distinctive collections held by research libraries have long been recognised as cultural assets by their institutions, with strong research and educational potential. Yet, over the past decades the practices and values of academic and cultural heritage institutions have shifted in response to pressures from a fast-changing society, the digital revolution and a constrained economic climate. These institutions, including research libraries, have been challenged to respond to the call for openness in scholarship and culture, as well as to prove their worth and positive impact on society. In such a shifting environment, the roles played by unique and distinctive collections are being reassessed and the way in which they can align with the wider institutions’ missions re-evaluated.

This report examines the role that the unique and distinctive collections play in enabling research libraries to meet their impact goals and investigates the ways impact resulting through relevant services and activities is evidenced. This work is directly linked to ‘Reshaping Scholarship’, the Research Libraries UK's (RLUK) strategy for 2018-2021 and constitutes part of the activities undertaken during the second phase of the RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP) (2017-2018), while the findings presented here will inform the next phase of the programme. Moreover, this research extends previous work by RLUK aiming to uncover the potential and value of special collections and archives.

Methodologically speaking, data collected in the context of the first phase of the Special Collections Programme was used as the basis for developing the research questions of this study. As part of this project a qualitative survey was designed and circulated amongst our members. The survey enabled us to further explore the approaches and methods adopted by library professionals for the purpose of increasing and evidencing the value of their collections as well as identify best practice across the membership.

The results show a shift towards more audience-focused strategies; by employing these approaches, which often include research, teaching and cross-institutional collaborations as well as public engagement activities, members aim to increase physical and digital access to collections and engage with a variety of audience groups. Yet, this is not surprising given that user-centred strategies and activities offer greater potential for producing measurable outcomes that showcase the value and impact of collections. Indeed, our findings show that RLUK members are highly interested in methods that enable them to capture and showcase their value and potential. Some of the main issues raised in this report are:

- RLUK research libraries are increasingly taking advantage of technology and fundraising opportunities to develop a variety of activities that raise the profile of their institutions and collections; these have transformed the image of special collection departments, from ‘closed’ spaces to hubs of creativity and innovation.
- Terminology used by universities to describe impact (closer to the REF criteria) does not always serve the strategic goals of the library and, thus, relevant activities may fail to reveal the full potential of special collections and archives as well as undermine the expertise and contribution of staff.
- RLUK members reported difficulties in tracking and capturing the impact of collections when used by external projects, measuring long term impact of library resources and services or effectively evaluating the use of their digital resources.
- The skill-set of collection professionals has expanded; apart from collection management, their responsibilities now include teaching, research and public engagement activities.

The following recommendations are based on the key findings of this report. Suggestions are made on how to implement these on both institutional and consortial level in order to achieve best results. These recommendations will help inform the next phase of the RLUK Special Collections Programme which aims to provide support in tackling the current challenges our members face around special collections and archives, such as demonstrating and capturing their impact.
Recommendation One: Advocacy and Lobbying

Advocating for the potential of special collections and archives to stimulate innovation and creativity in research, teaching and public engagement can lead to more reward and recognition for research libraries. As the results of this report show, this can be translated into greater willingness from stakeholders to support special collections, generate national and international interest and lead to fruitful collaborations.

**Institutionally:** Successful institutional advocacy will require the development of close links with the local audience communities, especially with academic and other champions of collections; co-operation of special collections staff with other library teams that can help increase their reach (e.g. research support staff, liaison librarians); the employment of communication strategies through a variety of analogue and digital media; and the building of portfolios of data showcasing impact. Opening up collections will greatly facilitate this purpose; increasing access to uncatalogued material still existing within institutions as well as improving discoverability of digital collections are essential steps towards creating opportunities for collecting data that showcases value.

**Collectively:** Coordinated effort is required to respond to the challenges that research libraries face in terms of obtaining recognition for the positive impact they have on raising the institutional profile through various collection-based initiatives. Influencing funders and other Higher Education stakeholders is an important aspect of this collective work; RLUK, through its Special Collections Programme (SCP) and its networks, can play a leading role in initiating discussions with members of such groups that aim to bring changes to the reward system for libraries. Advocating for the inclusion of library staff into funding applications when appropriate as well as effectively communicating the challenges posed by issues such the language used by stakeholders to describe and evidence impact (see also Recommendation Two) need to be part of relevant discussions. Finally, producing work that will help address issues around the accessibility and discoverability of special collections and archives will eventually lead to more opportunities for initiatives that will demonstrate the impact of collections.

Recommendation Two: Terminology

In this report, it becomes apparent that many university libraries tend to follow the impact statements that their institutions are employing. However, as these are often closer to the REF criteria, they do not always serve the strategic goals of the library and offer limited opportunities for bringing recognition and reward back to the library.

**Institutionally:** Influencing the university senior management teams as well as other stakeholders responsible for the way impact is defined and evidenced within institutions is necessary. More specifically, individual libraries need to clearly communicate that activities designed and delivered to meet the goals set by existing definitions may fail to reveal the full potential of special collections and archives as well as undermine the expertise and contribution of staff. This, in turn, can lead to difficulties in evidencing and measuring the value of collections and related services which will have a negative effect not only on the library but on the profile of the institution as well. On the other hand, taking into account the mission and goals of the library when designing or employing strategies around impact will lead to initiatives and collaborations that will prove beneficial for all parties.

**Collectively:** It is worth collectively considering the development of a common language to describe the value and significance of collections and advocating for its acknowledgment by university and other stakeholders, such as funders. This approach will ensure that the methods used to evidence and capture the impact of special collections are recognised by home institutions and beyond and, thus, the rewards for the library are more easily yielded. RLUK, through its Special Collections Leadership Network (SCLN) and Funders Network, can raise awareness about the challenges that existing approaches to describing and evidencing impact bring to research libraries and commission work to help address aspects of the problem.
Recommendation Three: Staff Skills Development

Based on our findings, getting involved in teaching, research or public engagement activities was common practice for most of the participants in this project. Moreover, as part of being engaged in impact-enhancing activities, staff members responsible for the management of special collections and archives often communicate and collaborate with other library teams, stakeholders and audience members, such as researchers, and undertake responsibilities that expand their traditional role.

**Institutionally:** Research libraries should invest in skills and professional development for staff and ensure that job descriptions accurately communicate the variety of activities in which potential employees will need to be engaged as well as the skills they should have. Making more visible the positive contribution that library professionals make to the institution through increasing the impact of collections is important in order to secure resources to support skills development initiatives. Finally, designing and engaging in activities that are closely tied to the library’s goal will ensure that the time invested by staff members can be more easily justified.

**Collectively:** RLUK should further investigate aspects of the cultural shift in libraries, including the changes in the traditional role and responsibilities of collection professionals; related work can lead to the development of a better understanding of the way current workflows, practices and training need to adapt in order to effectively support staff members. Additionally, identifying best practice and sharing resources and expertise through the Special Collections Programme, its activities and networks, will also prove valuable in terms of helping members navigate this shift in working culture.

Recommendation Four: Capturing and Demonstrating Value

As this report shows, research libraries have a good level of awareness with regards to the ways their collections are used within institutions which make it easier for them to capture and showcase value. However, many often find it challenging to track and capture the impact of collections when used for external projects, measure long term impact of library resources and services or effectively evaluate the use of their digital resources.

**Institutionally:** Building close relationships with local audience groups can be vital for keeping track of the projects that utilise parts of a library’s collections. Approaching researchers at an early stage of their projects, such as when designing a funding or research proposal, will ensure that, where appropriate, collections and the contribution of library staff are visible to funders and other stakeholders. This visibility can then make it easier for libraries to capture and evidence impact (e.g. through citations and REF case studies) and, thus, build a portfolio of successful cases that will bring more recognition and reward. Finally, individual institutions should consider a variety of methodological options (e.g. through looking at the broader cultural heritage sector for relevant models) before identifying the most appropriate methods (quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) to employ when assessing the short term or long term impact of collection-based initiatives. This approach will make sure that the resulting data provides clear insights into the value of collections and related services and can be used accordingly.

**Collectively:** Through this report, it becomes apparent that a collective approach towards developing more structured methodologies for measuring and evidencing the impact of special collections and archives is needed. RLUK, through its Special Collections Programme, can further explore aspects of this problem, identify and share best practice, and commission relevant work for the benefit of the membership. Moreover, improving current citation models for unique and distinctive collections will help address many of the issues that research libraries face when it comes to showcasing value, such as evidencing the long term impact of collections and evaluating digital resources.
BACKGROUND

In today’s constantly evolving information and scholarly environment, educational and cultural institutions, such as research libraries, are faced with a pressing demand to assess the value of their services and evidence their impact. According to Streatfield and Markless (2012, pp. 7-12), factors such as change caused by recent developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and challenges imposed by the current economic climate have resulted in a cultural shift that involves a greater ‘focus on performance management and accountability in public institutions’, the development of a ‘value for money ethos’ that is linked to the distribution of funding based on results, and a shift towards more evidence-based work as a response to the need of navigating and managing change. These factors along with the introduction of assessment systems, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK Higher Education agenda, have had a significant effect on research libraries which has led to the employment of more user-centred approaches for developing their services as well as to the introduction of practices and methods for collecting and demonstrating their impact.

Regarding special collection departments, previous studies in the area have attempted to map the cultural shift that they have been experiencing. Tam (2017, p. 180) explains how digitisation and outreach activities have opened up collections and, consequently, transformed the image of the profession and its practices; from ‘treasure rooms’ with limited access, special collections now increasingly form the basis for the development of services and programmes that enable research libraries to engage with their diverse audience groups in new and creative ways. Yet, this change has brought not only opportunities, but also challenges for the profession. In one of the most recent and comprehensive resources around special collections, the second edition of the special collections handbook, Cullingford (2016) provided a more holistic view of the matters that concern special collection professionals nowadays, from care and digitisation of collections to widening access and fundraising.

The reports by RLUK (Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens, 2014) and OCLC (Dooley et al., 2013), in collaboration with RLUK, apart from exploring issues around the development of special collections by modern research libraries in the UK and Ireland, have highlighted the important role that unique and distinctive collections play in their institutions and the ways these can foster innovation and creativity. The activities led by special collections and archives professionals to engage different audience groups, such as faculty, students or the general public have been further investigated by various studies (e.g. see Mason, 2014; Harris and Weller, 2012; Schmiesing and Hollis, 2002). Others have focused particularly on the effects of digitisation on special collections as well as the advantages and challenges concerning their creation and management in the digital age (e.g. see Sabharwal, 2015; Daigle, 2012).

However, despite the increased activity in opening up collections and engaging with various audiences, much of the effort and expertise put in by special collections staff remains hidden when it comes to formal evaluation schemes such as the REF. How can we make sure that research libraries gain formal recognition for the value they add to their institutions and the ways they benefit various communities? In the face of constant budget reductions and pressure to demonstrate the impact of library services and initiatives to funders and other stakeholders, advocating for the value of special collections and archives and making their potential visible is an essential first step for ensuring that their significance is acknowledged and awarded.

Thus, it is not surprising that recent years have seen the publication of several impact models related to cultural heritage resources; Tanner’s ‘Balanced Value Impact Model’ (Tanner, 2012) and Europeana’s ‘Impact Playbook’ (Verwayen et al., 2017) are two well-known examples. Much discussion has also focused on the most appropriate ways of evidencing the impact of resources, such as special collections (e.g. see Dupont and Yakel, 2013; O’Gara, Walters and Putirskis, 2010). According to Carter (2012) and Dupont and Yakel (2013), improving access to special collections and employing more audience-focused strategies are pathways to impact and can lead to activities that produce tangible and measurable results which will effectively communicate the value of collections and the expertise of staff.
Apart from that, and although Arts and Humanities and Cultural Heritage fields are often required to provide quantitative data that prove their value, recent work has highlighted the importance of qualitative information or mixed methodological approaches in understanding the multidimensional impact of cultural work. For instance, it is hard to capture and truly comprehend the effect of scholarship and culture on the ‘personal experience’ through statistical data alone (Crossick, 2017). Regarding libraries and their services, Brophy (2008, p. 16) argued over the importance of context when measuring and assessing performance and noted that ‘[…] because of the complexity of information and communication flows in blended (real and virtual) environments […]’, qualitative methods are more appropriate for gathering evidence that tells ‘rich’ stories of achievement. Some of the reasons why qualitative methodologies are particularly suitable for gathering information related to the significance and impact of unique and distinctive collections become apparent through Marsh et al.’s (2016) paper. By focusing on digitised ethnographic collections, the authors explained how quantitative data can undermine the importance such collections have for specific communities and, thus, hinder their real value; qualitative methods, such as collecting stories, were deemed more appropriate for understanding and articulating the significance of these collections.

The recently developed RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP) (more information is provided in the next section) employs a similar approach towards the collection of evidence that showcase the impact of collections. The SCP is a flexible programme of networks, tools and opportunities designed to improve access to, and use of, special collections across RLUK’s membership; it has a special focus on encouraging wide-ranging audience engagement with collections and inclusion of collections in teaching and learning programmes at institutional level and beyond. Moreover, advocating for the significance of special collections and the integral contribution of library staff in academic life is an important aspect of this programme. Thus, in the context of the SCP, we collected stories that demonstrate the potential of the unique and distinctive holdings of our members and close partners as well as the expertise of staff in three areas: research, teaching and learning, and public engagement. These stories, which often communicate the journeys to impact that some of our members and partners experienced, formed the basis for developing the objectives and research questions of this report and inspired the further collection of data around the strategies employed by our members to evidence the impact of their collections.

The purpose of this report is to explore the role that special collections and archives play in enabling research libraries to meet their impact goals as well as investigate the ways the impact resulting through relevant services and activities is evidenced. It constitutes part of the activities undertaken during the second phase of the SCP (2017–2018) and is directly linked to the strategic goals of RLUK in this area as outlined in the RLUK Strategy 2018–2021: Reshaping Scholarship. Also, relevant discussions have been held in the context of activities led by some of RLUK’s core networks, such as the Associate Directors Network (ADN), the Special Collections Leadership Network (SCLN), and the Digital Scholarship Network (DSN). This research extends previous work by RLUK aiming to uncover the potential and value of the unique and distinctive collections held by research libraries.

Finally, through this work, we aspire to contribute to the ongoing national and international dialogue around the value and significance of Arts and Culture and promote the vital role that special collections and archives can play in their institutions and beyond.
METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on the methodological approach employed for the purposes of this project. Firstly, we discuss the terminology used as part of the report. Then, as this study constitutes part of the RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP), more contextual information is provided about the structure of the programme and its purpose. Additionally, we present an overview of the impact stories that were collected during the first phase of the programme (2016-2017) and inspired the development of this report. Finally, the report’s objectives and research questions as well as the decision making process behind data collection and analysis are presented.

DEFINITIONS

Two of the most frequently employed terms in this report are ‘special collections’ and ‘impact’. Regarding the former, it is often used interchangeably with the term ‘special collections and archives’, while these collections are regularly characterised as ‘unique and distinctive’. The definition which sets the broader framework within which these terms are employed and understood is that provided by Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens in their RLUK report ‘Unique and Distinctive Collections: Opportunities for Research Libraries’ in 2014. This definition explains that a unique and distinctive collection is:

‘A collection that, regardless of format or location within an institution, derives significance from its interest to research, teaching or society through its association with a person, place or topic, such as to distinguish the constituent items from similar items which may exist elsewhere’. (Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens, 2014, p. 12)

Concerning the term ‘impact’ when it comes to library resources, such as library collections, and related services, several definitions have been provided by previous studies that reflect the views of different stakeholders (e.g. Brophy 2005; Tanner, 2012; Streatfield and Markless, 2012; Marsh et al., 2016). Generally speaking, these definitions frequently refer to the measurable outcomes that can be derived from the existence and use of these resources or the services designed around them. These outcomes describe the short or long term effect library resources and services can have on people (individually or as a group) or on specific cases (e.g. advancement of research in an area of study) and which can lead to change (often positive).

In the context of the RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP) and, thus, in this report, the term ‘impact’ is used to describe:

The demonstrable contribution that the unique and distinctive collections of our members can make to research, teaching and learning as well as to society and its wellbeing.

This definition also takes into account the ‘pathways’ through which impact is achieved, such as the audience-focused strategies developed by most of our members to increase access to and engagement with special collections and archives regardless of their format. Moreover, in the context of this definition, we recognise the unequivocal role that library staff members, including their skills and expertise, play in the implementation and successful delivery of these strategies. Finally, when referring to the ‘value’ and ‘significance’ of special collections in this report, we aim to describe the potential of these collections to lead to positive, short or long term, change within their institutions and beyond.
The premise behind the RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP), which was launched in 2016, is that audience-led strategies have greater potential than collection-based approaches to drive up use of and engagement with special collections, unlock recognition and reward (e.g. media coverage, sponsorship, funding) and, in turn, lead to internal and external investment opportunities. By focusing on impact for teaching, research and public engagement, our members are better able to demonstrate the potential value of their unique and distinctive collections.

The dual aims of the development phase (2016-2017) were, firstly, to establish a coherent framework across the RLUK membership network capable of supporting an emerging RLUK audience-focused strategy and, secondly, build external relationships and develop the capacity of our members’ special collection departments to attract the interest, support and funding needed to drive the strategy forward, once defined. More specifically, as part of this first phase of activity, our plan was:

- To devise and drive forward a sustainable programme of activities, events and initiatives designed to inform and underpin the development of a new strategy for RLUK special collections, with a focus on the audiences who might use the collections.
- To develop a core vision for the strategy based around shared values, a collective voice and a common framework with enough flexibility to allow institutions across the network to act both independently and collaboratively.
- To establish a strong leadership voice for RLUK to advocate and support its special collections agenda.
- To foster collaborative working practices and nurture existing skills and knowledge across the network, while learning from existing exemplars and supporting best practice.

Goals were met through an iterative, consultative and open process based on seven defined work strands, linked through the shared mission to develop an audience-focused approach towards special collections: Audience, Discoverability, Recognition, Significance, Leadership, Collective Involvement, and Funding. More specifically, to explore and understand issues around these strands, we delivered a number of regional workshops, set up key relationships and networks, and developed tools and resources to take forward to the next stage. Workshops in Manchester, London, Glasgow and Birmingham explored themes around Leadership, Audience, Significance and Preparing for Success with a range of RLUK members, external speakers from diverse backgrounds, funders and other national stakeholders. Direct relationships and contacts were formed, on behalf of RLUK, with key stakeholders, including funders and other national bodies.
The relationships were further developed through three emerging networks (also see Fig. 1 for the SCP operational model which includes the networks):

- The RLUK Special Collections Leadership Network (SCLN) which is a peer network of heads of special collections and archives departments. It meets three times a year and elects two co-convenors every two years.

- The RLUK Special Collections Advisory Network (SCAN), previously RLUK Advisory Group for Special Collections (AG), which is a flexible network of senior research leaders, public engagement experts and RLUK Board and Executive members. SCAN was originally established as a group to provide expert advice and guidance at the outset of the development phase.

- The RLUK Funders Network (FN) was set up as an informal meeting point for funders with a library/archives remit. This group has now expanded to include representatives from Arts Council England (ACE), Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Heritage Fund, Wellcome Trust, Leverhulme Trust, The National Archives (TNA), Jisc, and Arcadia Fund. The group meets two to three times a year to share developments, ideas and common challenges and opportunities.

Regarding the resources developed as part of the first phase of the programme, these comprise:

- The creation of a data set of stories which demonstrate the value and significance of our members’ and close partners’ special collections and archives and their role in advancing research, teaching and learning as well as driving public engagement; an overview of this case-based evidence of success follows in the next sub-section.

- A proposed design for developing the SCP’s online presence which is currently being implemented. The SCP-related space on the RLUK website will enable remote access for the networks and also establish a wider reach for members of the public to follow developments. Furthermore, it will form the ideal place to publish the impact stories mentioned above and form the basis for building a resource of case-based evidence of success. Finally, the SCP online space will be used to list other relevant resources and tools, such as this report.
Thinking about the opportunities offered as part of the programme, these entail a number of workshop, training and networking events which focus on knowledge exchange and skills development. However, given that attendance to these events is often limited to members and selected guests, we added three more SCP-related events to the programme (two events in 2017) in order to share our experiences with the broader sector. These take place at the annual, UK-based ‘Discovering Collections, Discovering Communities (DCDC)’ Conference that RLUK organises in collaboration with The National Archives (TNA). The DCDC conference series, with its large number of delegates (c.400) coming from the wider library, archive and museum as well as academic sectors, offer great outreach opportunities for RLUK, including the SCP and its networks.

A set of recommendations for the development of an audience-focused strategy for RLUK special collections also constituted part of the outputs of this first phase of the programme; these were taken into consideration during the refresh of the RLUK Strategy for 2018-2021 and set the goals for the next period of activities in the area. The second phase of the SCP (2017-2018), which has been concluded, aimed to embed the programme and establish sustainable practice for longer term success. As part of this plan, we worked with our members to identify further areas of interest, including current challenges and concerns, around special collections and archives that would lead to new strands of strategic activity for RLUK.
As noted earlier, the stories collected as part of the first phase of the SCP will form the basis for the creation of an online, open access, resource that will constitute a tool for advocating for the value of special collections in research, teaching and learning as well as public engagement. Moreover, through building a database of successful impact stories we hope to demonstrate the effectiveness of qualitative methodologies and, particularly, case-based evidence in capturing, interpreting and communicating cultural impact (e.g. see Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016, p. 9); this method has been also endorsed by the SCP advisory network.

This resource will be of special interest to members and those in the broader cultural heritage sector who are interested in developing impact strategies and activities or capturing and communicating the significance of their collections. The case studies that will be published on the SCP platform will showcase good practice, creative outputs and outcomes and shine a light on some of the pathways to impact. The first twenty-six case studies that were collected during the first phase were categorised based on the themes of ‘places and spaces’, ‘people and projects’, and ‘research outputs’ – as our data set grows, these categorisation themes are likely to evolve and potentially change. Each case study comprises one or a combination of the following: a published or previously unpublished narrative (e.g. blog posts, journal articles) where library staff and/or researchers share their experiences within specific projects and reflect on the journey to success; a film or a sound recording where library professionals and/or researchers discuss projects based on special collection and archival material; one or more project outputs outside the aforementioned formats, such as a website, a repository, an exhibition. An overview of the categories with selected case study examples and related comments is provided below:

**Places and Spaces**

**Selected examples:**
Museum of English Rural Life, Reading; John Rylands Research Institute, Manchester; Interdisciplinary Visiting Scholars Centre, Bodleian Library, Oxford; Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University; The Keep, Brighton Local Records Office, University of Sussex.

**Comments:**
This category includes cases of capital projects, often involving collaborations, which have led to the development of new buildings and spaces that were deemed successful in terms of opening up new impact possibilities for the libraries and their special collections. Generally speaking, the purpose of creating new spaces was mainly threefold: to create state-of-the-art spaces and facilities for the storage, display and upkeep of collections; to increase accessibility to collections and engagement with existing and new audiences; to develop new collaborations and partnerships that would enable research libraries to meet their strategic goals.

For the institutions included in the examples list, developing these new buildings and spaces allowed them to modernise their facilities as well as create new possibilities for displaying their collections in ways that invited fresh and innovative interpretations to occur. Increasing the opportunities for creative engagement with collections was an important aspect of getting involved in these capital projects; thus, new exhibition areas, teaching and learning spaces, digital and interactive technology facilities and extended programmes of events and activities were often hosted in these spaces and enabled libraries to open their collections to existing and new audiences.
It is worth noting that these spaces and their new offerings often constituted the basis for developing collaborations and partnerships with researchers and professionals from different organisations and institutions. Forming these collaborations was sometimes necessary for securing funding or bringing new projects in the library that raised its profile and that of its collections nationally and internationally. In the stories we collected, special collections professionals often describe the benefits and challenges of engaging in such capital projects and share the lessons they learnt which can be of interest to those who wish to follow a similar approach.

For instance, in the case of the Manchester University Library, creating links with the research community while developing the project proposal and communicating effectively to the University Senior Leadership team the benefits that the creation of a space such as the John Rylands Research Institute would bring to the institution were necessary steps that led to the approval of the project. On the other hand, in the example of the Centre for Research Collections in Edinburgh, we learn that the convergence of museum, special and archive collections that took place as part of the project generated new challenges around collection management that required novel solutions to be found, while, in the story around the building of the Keep, staff members were faced with the challenge of engaging new audiences and, thus, had to reconsider their approach and extend their offering.

People and Projects

Selected examples:

People: Dr Johanna Green, Lecturer in Book History and Digital Humanities, University of Glasgow; Dr Anita Quye, Senior Lecturer in Conservation Science, History of Art, University of Glasgow; Ms Zoe Strachan, Senior Lecturer in English Literature, University of Glasgow. Projects: Hugh Sinclair Nutrition Archive, Reading University; Roslin Institute Archive, Edinburgh University.

Comments:

This is a collection of, mainly, sound recordings and film clips featuring academics talking about their subjects, methods and teaching activities and the role that special collections and archives have played in developing them as well as collections staff showcasing and discussing (parts of) collections that have been the focus of recent access funding projects to support research.

In the first case, researchers argue over the importance of unique and distinctive collections as a source of inspiration for research as well as a tool for teaching and public engagement. For instance, Dr Green explains how engagement with physical and digitised versions of special collection items (e.g. manuscripts), combined with tools such as social media, can lead to transformative learning experiences for students. Regarding the collection professional’s viewpoint, the case studies included under this theme will hopefully offer a glimpse into the journey of making collections accessible to different audiences; from the time that a new collection arrives at the library to the use of this collection for producing groundbreaking research and creative public engagement activities. The exhibition around the ‘Making of Dolly’ based on the material from the Roslin Institute Archive is a great example illustrating the successful completion of such a journey.

Thus, the stories categorised under the theme of ‘People and Projects’ aim to communicate the potential of the unique and distinctive collections to stimulate ideas for activities that will bring clear benefits to both research libraries and researchers. Moreover, the library is presented as the ideal platform for academics to showcase their work and increase the impact of their work. Finally, through these case studies, it becomes apparent that uncovering special collections and archives and encouraging imaginative use and engagement with the material can inspire new collaborations that can lead to further funding, raise the profile of the institution and demonstrate the value of collections.
Collection-based research outputs

**Selected examples:**

War Child, Museum of English Rural Life/ University of Reading; The Casebooks Project, Cambridge University/ Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University; The Cullen Project, University of Glasgow/ Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (RCPE).

**Comments:**

The stories categorised under this theme include examples of research outputs from larger-scale projects which are based on either a single source or subject themed sources from numerous collections in locations around the UK. The outputs range from online repositories and websites to digital humanities projects, exhibitions and narratives and they offer fascinating insights into the complex ways in which collections have contributed to the wider impact of current research.

The selected projects presented above constitute the result of collaboration between different professionals from a single institution or across institutions; their outputs have successfully inspired further research and opened up opportunities for new projects and activities. For example, the Casebooks Project, which is a digital humanities initiative, resulted into the creation of a dataset based on the medical records of the astrologers Simon Forman and Richard Napier and a tool for searching and viewing these records. The dataset and tool were accompanied by the publication of explanatory material about the project and the development of public engagement activities which informed the way the casebooks were presented and explained. By making this material widely accessible, the project stakeholders enabled further research on the topic and raised awareness about the material held in the collection.

Yet, in the stories of these larger-scale, cross-institutional initiatives, the part that funding institutions play in realising the projects and ensuring that outputs are sustainable and accessible in the longer term is particularly evident. Managing funders’ expectations alongside institutional priorities can be an additional challenge for research libraries, but the impact possibilities that are usually opened through engaging in such initiatives make the effort worthwhile. Furthermore, through such collaborations, libraries have the opportunity to build a portfolio of successful projects or case studies that showcase the value of collections for different audience groups and can be used to secure further institutional or external funding. Finally, apart from best practice in producing collection-based research outputs, the case studies under this theme also highlight the role of the library as a partner in research, not just the source provider, who has an active role in accomplishing the goals of a project and furthering its impact.
PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As previously argued, the stories collected in the context of the first phase of the RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP) and the issues they raise constituted the inspiration for embarking on this project. Through this report, we aim to further explore the role that special collections and archives play in enabling institutions to meet their impact goals as well as investigate the ways that impact resulting through relevant services and activities is evidenced. More specifically, our objectives are:

- To explore the strategies employed by RLUK member libraries towards achieving and evidencing impact through special collections.
- To identify the opportunities and challenges involved in developing and implementing relevant strategies and activities.
- To identify and share best practice around impact-enhancing strategies for special collections.
- To advocate for the value and significance of special collections and archives.

The research questions we set to answer for the purposes of meeting the above objectives are:

- What pathways (physical and digital) are followed by research libraries in order to increase the value and impact of unique and distinctive collections?
- What are the types of impact achieved through special collections?
- How do research libraries capture and evidence the impact of their special collections?
- What are the characteristics of successful impact stories?
- What are the benefits and challenges of engaging in impact-enhancing activities as well as the lessons learnt?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

For the purposes of answering the research questions of this project and, thus, meeting our objectives, we designed a qualitative survey which enabled us to gather more information around the role of special collections and archives in generating impact and the ways this is evidenced across the RLUK membership.

The application chosen for the design of the survey and the collection of data was Google Forms. The questionnaire (Appendix I) entailed mostly open ended questions aiming to capture as much detail as possible regarding the views and experiences of our members on the topic; thus, attention was given in providing participants with the opportunity to describe their own institutional case and share their experiences through including a long answer text box under most of the questions. The survey was circulated through the RLUK Special Collections Leadership Network (SCLN) and was completed by representatives from sixteen member university libraries across the UK and Ireland. The survey respondents were mostly professionals responsible for the management of special collections and archives and their roles ranged from archivists and keepers of archives to managers and heads of special collections, archives and galleries. Amongst the participants were also one director and one assistant director with strategic responsibility for collections.
Participants were asked to respond to questions on the below areas:

- The types of special collections and archives they hold as well as their audience groups.
- Their institution’s strategies around impact, including any definitions they may have.
- The types of services they provide or activities they design with the aim of increasing the impact of their special collections and archives.
- Any successful initiatives which were based on the use of special collections and archives and were led by their institutions, including the benefits and challenges they entailed.
- The methods they employ for capturing and measuring the impact of collections.

The data was collected and analysed between June and August 2018 while, during the interpretation stage, relevant literature in the field was consulted. Each survey respondent was given a participant number based on the order they completed the survey (e.g. Participant 01, Participant 02). Before proceeding with the presentation of the results, though, it should be noted that this was an exploratory study, conducted within the framework of the RLUK Special Collections Programme (SCP), with the aim of encouraging conversation around issues that our members currently face and are related to the value and significance of their special collections. Thus, the results presented here may not necessarily reflect the situation in other libraries across the UK and Ireland or beyond.

SURVEY RESULTS

In this section, we present and briefly discuss some of the key findings that emerged from the analysis of the survey data.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

As anticipated, the survey responses around the types and formats of materials that can be found in the collections of participating institutions revealed the vastness of the holdings of member libraries across the UK and Ireland as well as their historical and institutional significance. These collections and archives include primary resources from across the centuries and on a variety of themes which make them of national and international significance and, as Participant 02 also argued, ‘of lasting research value’.

The diversity in the types and formats of materials held by participating institutions ranged from print book and manuscript collections to film archives and collections of cultural artefacts and artworks. Moreover, the majority of respondents stated that their digitised and born-digital holdings were constantly growing while, amongst the examples provided, there were designated collections, which had received formal recognition of their value. The below sample quotes from the survey clearly illustrate the variety of resources held by RLUK member libraries:

‘Wide ranging subjects - English Literature, WW1, Cookery, Gypsy & Traveller, Quakers, Cathedral Archives, Feminism, Russian literature and exile, Estate papers, medieval manuscripts - approximately 15km in physical size. Born digital collections are growing.’ (Participant 3)

‘Manuscripts (Western, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Near and Middle Eastern, South Asian, Tibetan and Southeast Asian, Hebrew), rare printed books (in cultural and language groups as per manuscripts), maps, music and archives. Consisting primarily of documentary collections with a smaller number of associated objects, audio-visual media and photographs. […]’ (Participant 11)
‘Rare books; traditional physical archives; born digital archives; digital surrogates of our own collections and content contributed by others.’ (Participant 13)

‘Our collections reflect the British experience overseas, with a primary (but not exclusive) focus on Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and we collect under the following subject categories: Missionaries, missionary organisations and religious groups; Business and trade organisations, and individuals involved with them; Charities, humanitarian organisations, non-governmental organisations and political campaigning groups; Individuals whose life or work has been of special relevance to the study of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, such as diplomats, missionaries, academics, teachers, lawyers, medical practitioners, journalists, linguists, anthropologists and historians, or their families who accompanied them.’ (Participant 16)

Before discussing the survey data on the audiences of these collections, though, it is worth noting that, apart from demonstrating the richness of resources held by participating institutions, responses such as the ones provided above also included some early indicators of the importance these collections have for their institutions, something that will become clearer in the following sections. For example, correlations between the themes represented in the collections and the research areas an institution was famed for were frequently evident, constituting indirect, but strong references to the value of these collections for their local academic communities as well as their role in raising the profile of a university.

Regarding the users of these resources (Fig. 2), the above graph shows that researchers and students were the core audience groups of all institutions participating in the survey; it should be reminded that the survey participants were representing UK and Irish university libraries. Concerning the academic audience, this often included the local research community (within the university and beyond) as well as international and visiting scholars; yet, through some of the survey answers, it became apparent that providing remote access to resources (such as digital resources) as well as online services was a prerequisite for developing and sustaining engagement with members of the international academic community. Apart from the academic and student groups, though, the majority of the respondents said that several of their collections were frequently used by members of the general public, including local communities and interest groups, while others reported use of their collections by stakeholders, professional services and other members of staff from their home institution, schools and alumni.
Finally, it is worthwhile adding that some of the participants elaborated on the way they segment their audiences in order to target their services and activities. For example, Participant 02 mentioned using the information provided by the Audience Agency as a guide for understanding their gallery audiences, whereas ‘being external or internal’ and ‘level of study’ were the criteria for segmenting academic and student users. Moreover, several of the professionals participating in this study highlighted the focus currently placed on extending access to new audiences; as some of them noted, this is often a requirement by funding bodies, such as Heritage Fund, supporting initiatives based on cultural heritage collections. Although it may not be immediately apparent, audience development practices as well as factors such as funders’ requirements play an important role when designing strategies with the aim of achieving impact and maximising the value of collections.

DEFINITIONS OF IMPACT

Since all respondents represented university research libraries, it is no coincidence that the below word cloud (Fig. 3), based on the impact definitions provided by participants, shows an emphasis on the advancement of research through collections.

![Figure 3 A word cloud based on the impact definitions employed by participating institutions](image)

More specifically, many of the participating libraries mentioned adopting the impact definitions of their home institutions, meaning the universities where they were based. These definitions were often developed to either follow the REF criteria or to refer to similar goals and values; thus, they placed a strong focus on research and the contribution that excellence in this area can make to society. The role that education and other activities led by the university can play towards improving society’s health and wellbeing was sometimes noted as well. However, within this context, some of the libraries had also developed their own working impact definitions; these communicated not only the contribution of the library to the broader mission of the university but also their responsibilities outside academia. Impact, from the perspective of the library, was seen as the contribution it can make to research and teaching through collecting or creating quality resources, and developing valued services and partnerships as well as to the well-being of non-academic communities through broadening access to and engagement with its collections.
Given that this dual responsibility of modern research libraries - to produce work that has both academic and civic benefits - is not usually reflected through the university’s impact statements, it is not surprising that many of the members chose to create their own definitions. More specifically, the language used as part of the universities’ impact definitions, with its strong focus on research and the REF criteria, cannot always communicate the value and positive effect of the audience-focused strategies and activities led by libraries; as Participant 01 argued, research libraries often use terms such as ‘engagement’ to refer to impact which echoes the language used by other cultural heritage institutions and funders to communicate about similar issues.

A challenge that may come out of employing an impact statement which does not fully serve a library’s strategy is that any relevant activities designed and delivered to meet the goals set by that definition may fail to reveal the full potential of special collections and archives as well as undermine the expertise and contribution of staff. This, in turn, can lead to difficulties in evidencing and measuring the value of collections and related services and hinder reward and recognition for libraries. Therefore, it is worth noting that one member (Participant 11) reported employing a definition which was closer to the way funding bodies such as the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) describe impact, while another (Participant 16) underlined the importance of the RLUK Special Collections Leadership Network (SCLN) in influencing the way they shape their definition and approach related to impact. Finally, it should be mentioned that there were two cases where no institutional definition of impact existed or could be found; activities around capturing and measuring the impact of library collections and services were based on personal initiative or were conducted on an ad-hoc basis.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPACT

As it becomes apparent through the below graph (Fig. 4), the majority of participating institutions were regularly engaged in activities that aimed to increase the impact of their unique and distinctive collections. Some of the most frequently mentioned activities were: the creation of new buildings and spaces with state-of-the-art facilities (e.g. labs, reading rooms); collection development activities to ensure that library resources remain relevant and accessible; exhibitions (physical and digital) and other public engagement programmes and events (e.g. festivals, open days, public talks, tours); loans of collections items to external exhibitions; collaboration in research and other cross-sector projects and initiatives; participation in cross-departmental schemes and programmes (e.g. new institutes); involvement in teaching activities, such as designing and delivering course modules; co-authoring/participating in funding proposals within/outside academia; digitisation and digital resource development initiatives; participation in advisory group panels and other networks; contribution to REF case studies based on special collections; hosting research fellowship, internship and visiting scholars programmes; developing communication strategies, e.g. use of social and traditional media.

6. Do you engage regularly in activities that aim to increase the impact of your special/archival collections?

![Graph showing the percentage of participating institutions engaging in impact-enhancing activities](image-url)
According to the participating members, the prevalent reason for getting involved in activities such as the above was the benefits that could be gained for the library and, by extension, for its home institution. These activities were commonly perceived as opportunities to showcase the richness and value of special collections and archives as well as the work conducted in the library to a broad audience of existing and future users and stakeholders. In more detail, the reported benefits of leading or participating in impact-enhancing activities were:

- Demonstrating the range and diversity of the library’s unique and distinctive collections and raising awareness about their potential.
- Improving access to digital and physical collections and developing sustainable and relevant approaches to engaging with new and existing users.
- Facilitating re-interpretation and innovative use of collections as well as creating new learning opportunities.
- Creating new digital resources that raise the profile of the university in specific areas of study.
- Showcasing any relevant work undertaken by the library with regards to its collections, e.g. a new digital preservation framework.
- Contributing to the mission of the university, participating in its governance structures in a positive way and raising its profile.
- Improving skills and ways of working for library staff (e.g. digital skills development).
- Contributing towards the improvement of the local economy (e.g. through hosting exhibitions and attracting visitors).
- Building a portfolio of activities that could lead to further funding, reward and recognition at local and national level.

It is worthwhile noting that sector-wide developments and national initiatives, such as celebrating anniversaries and launching new funding schemes, often provided suitable ground for engaging in a range of activities. However, although respondents agreed that the overall experience of being actively involved in such initiatives has been positive, it has not been without its challenges. Some of the most frequently encountered difficulties were related to the logistics of organising, running or participating in certain types of activities, such as exhibitions or collaborative projects (e.g. inconsistency of funding, licencing issues, managing staff time and availability). For those involved in larger scale projects, negotiating the conflicting priorities of many stakeholders could be problematic; this happened particularly in the cases where the library was not seen as a full-fledged partner. Lastly, others reported facing challenges when designing initiatives to engage new audience groups; trying to sustain momentum for long term projects; dealing with the media; and learning about new technologies and how they could be used as part of projects.
CAPTURING AND MEASURING VALUE

Regarding the types of evidence gathered by members libraries with the purpose of showcasing the impact of special collections and that of related activities, they included: anecdotal feedback; exhibition visitor data and demographic data; ticket sales; data from interactive exhibits; results from traditional questionnaires and feedback/survey forms (e.g. teaching); data from interviews with users (e.g. researchers and students); item or service request numbers; metrics and automated statistic gathering from digital initiatives; evidence of activity provided by academic ‘champions’, responsible for advocating for library collections; media coverage and high social media engagement; examples of fostering future research or follow-on projects; citations in publications; occupancy rates for reading and search rooms; items produced for researchers and classes; data produced for evaluation and assessment reports.

Thus, according to our findings, initiatives based on special collections and archives were deemed successful if they had achieved several of the following: received positive feedback; generated publicity; attracted a high number of visitors; led to increased use of the collections by existing and new users; received strong endorsement from senior levels in the university; received the stated willingness of lenders to be involved in future projects, such as exhibitions; had a high number of hits to a project’s or other resource’s website. As a result of success, collection professionals were often approached by people from within their home institution, other organisations or the general public who expressed an interest in an initiative or other aspects of the library’s work; for example, there would be increased interest by local academics in collaborating with the library (e.g. to co-curate an exhibition or to co-author a funding application).

As part of developing a sound understanding of how research libraries capture evidence that demonstrate the value of their collections and that of related services and activities, we asked members to elaborate on how they learn about institutional and third-party projects (especially research projects) that utilise parts of their collections or reference any contribution that library staff members have made as well as how they capture outputs from such projects. Generally speaking, it became apparent that member libraries had a good level of awareness of how collections were used as part of institutional projects, especially in the cases where a library was directly involved in a research project, had provided advice on a funding application or one of its collections was referenced in a REF case study.

Moreover, working closely with local academics and other users of the collections (e.g. artists) as well as developing relationships with key people across the university (e.g. PIs, research assistants) were considered as effective methods for learning about projects and related outputs that could be used as examples to showcase the value of collections. Others noted that being part of networks and advisory group panels, collaborating more closely with other library teams (e.g. research data team) or receiving direct requests for access, supply of digital surrogates, or supply of additional information relating to collection/items had resulted in discovering about such projects and outputs.

Yet, the majority reported that it was harder to find out about projects outside the university that utilised parts of their collections (physical or digital) and capture their outputs; thus, the impact that library resources or the work of staff had on these projects could not be evidenced. Capturing research outputs of third-party projects was often an ad-hoc activity or depended on personal initiative. Searching for citations through Google Books or through social networking websites such as Academia and ResearchGate was common practice, but many found this method cumbersome and ineffective. Projects involving use of printed sources were particularly hard to locate as citations of individual copies were rarely made in resulting publications. Whenever member libraries were made aware of the existence of such projects, they requested to be sent copies of books or be alerted to publications and other resources involving use of their collections, but this often occurred when an item request (e.g. for an image) was involved.
Other reported difficulties were specifically related to the evaluation of digital resources as well as the measurement of long-term impact of the programmes and activities led by the library as several members highlighted the lack of structured methods for capturing related evidence. For instance, Participant 01 noted the difficulty in capturing the impact of digital resources while Participant 16 commented on the challenge their institution faces with regards to tracking the long-term impact of activities, such as events:

’[…] There are no real systems in place to capture what people are doing with our collections. In the digital environment, we have even less information.’ (Participant 01)

’It is harder to measure the longer term impact of the event - while it was well received by those who attended (which is a valid outcome in itself) we do not have an easy way of identifying any increased use of our service that may have followed.’ (Participant 16)

It is worth adding that, as part of investigating potential methods for tackling challenges such as the ones mentioned above, some members said that they were using or planning to use openly available toolkits provided by funding bodies or published independently, such as the ’Making Digital Work’ toolkit by Arts Council England (ACE), UK Research and Innovation’s (UKRI) logic model approach to planning and evaluation, and Tanner’s (2012) ’Balanced Value Impact Model’. Moreover, there were few examples of assessment programmes developed and led by libraries, such as the ’Futurelib Innovation Programme’ which, as Participant 11 argued, can be used for evaluating public programmes. Finally, it should be noted that few institutions did not have any structured ways of measuring the impact of their work.

For the last part of the questionnaire, participants were invited to comment on any prospective institutional plans related to initiatives that aim to evidence and measure the value of collections or share any ideas they may have had for tackling the problems currently associated with capturing significance and impact. Below, Participants 04, 12 and 15 share some of the plans their institutions have in this area:

’Working towards a circulation system for archives and manuscripts that records use in reading rooms and provides opportunities for analytics’ (Participant 04)

’Many of our measures to date for ongoing activities (rather than special projects) are quantitative, and we are seeking to develop processes for gathering more qualitative data, particularly for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching; and research outputs and outcomes.’ (Participant 12)

’Longer term, we seek to directly link our academic research outputs to our Collections catalogues to demonstrate the importance, inter-reliance and recycling of knowledge from unique and distinctive collections.’ (Participant 15)
Concerning participants’ suggestions with regards to improving the process of measuring and capturing the impact of special collections and archives, these were often related to the below points:

- Raise awareness about the role that the Library can play in creating impact.
- Take advantage of new tools and approaches to measure reach and impact electronically - collaboration with other teams within the library is key (e.g. IT).
- Develop better methods for capturing impact through mentions in academic publications, especially from external projects.
- Consider different approaches for evidencing the two main types of impact for research libraries, academic and civic, as well as capturing long-term impact of library activities based on special collections and archives.
- Develop a set of measures and benchmarks (e.g. RLUK-wide or national) that will offer a more standardised way to measure impact and help bring funding back to the library. For instance, a standardised citation format for special collections would be useful in this instance as citations could be more easily measured.

This section on the methods followed by participating member libraries for capturing and evidencing the value of special collections and archives and related activities concludes the presentation of the survey results. Through looking at the diversity and range of research libraries’ collections and their audiences and providing information about member libraries’ impact strategies, including the definitions they employed and impact measurement methods they used, the aim was to provide a more holistic view of the approaches to impact developed by modern research libraries. A discussion based on the major points that emerged through the presentation of the results follows in the next part of the report.

**DISCUSSION**

This project aims to further our understanding of the role that special collections and archives play in enabling institutions to meet their impact goals as well as investigate the ways that impact resulting through relevant services and activities is evidenced. Here, we summarise and discuss the main points raised during the presentation of the survey data.

**PLANNING FOR SUCCESS**

Based on our results, it was clear that RLUK members are frequently engaged in activities that aim to increase the impact of their collections and services and are highly interested in methods that enable them to capture and showcase their value and potential. It is worth noting that, compared to the findings of the RLUK report by Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens (2014), which addressed similar issues, RLUK research libraries are now increasingly taking advantage of technology and fundraising opportunities to develop activities that raise the profile of their institutions and collections. More specifically, while in the 2014 RLUK report a great part of the discussion focused on how special collections can contribute to their institutions (Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens, 2014, pp. 17-50), this report showed that research libraries have been already contributing towards institutional goals through their collections and a wide range of activities and collaborations based on them.
The recent shift towards audience-focused strategies and the steps taken by members to increase physical and digital access to collections and engage with a variety of audience groups have offered greater potential for producing measurable outcomes that showcase the value and impact of collections. In that respect, our findings confirm previous studies’ arguments (e.g. Carter, 2012; Dupont and Yakel, 2013) on the potential of audience-led strategies to generate better opportunities for demonstrating the significant role that special collections and archives can play in enabling institutions to meet their impact goals.

However, in order to be able to develop effective success strategies and bring benefits back to the library, some additional factors should be taken into account. For instance, at the university strategic level, there should be a good understanding of the role that the library can play in creating impact. Opening up collections will greatly facilitate this purpose; increasing access to uncatalogued material still existing within institutions as well as improving discoverability of digital collections are essential steps towards creating opportunities for collecting data that showcases value. Advocating for the value of collections within the institution and beyond and developing relationships with senior members of the university are considered crucial steps; according to our findings, forming cross-departmental collaborations was not only an effective way of achieving impact, but also a great way to communicate the potential of collections and gain the support of home institutions.

Apart from the above points, given that the terminology used by universities to describe impact (closer to the REF criteria) does not always serve the strategic goals of the library, it is worth collectively considering the development of a common language to describe the value and significance of collections and advocating for its acknowledgment by university and other stakeholders, such as funders. This approach will ensure that the methods used to evidence and capture the impact of special collections are recognised by home institutions and beyond and, thus, the rewards for the library are more easily yielded. As part of this approach, the way libraries communicate about their unique and distinctive collections and their impact to their audiences should be also re-considered; looking at relevant examples from the broader cultural heritage sector (e.g. museums) may provide some useful insights.

In this report, aspects of the evolving role of the collection professional became particularly evident. As part of being engaged in impact-enhancing activities, staff members responsible for the management of special collections and archives were found to collaborate with other library teams, stakeholders and audience members, such as researchers, and undertake responsibilities that expanded their traditional role. For example, getting involved in teaching, research or public engagement activities was common practice for most of the participants in this project. Furthermore, it is should be added that as part of these new responsibilities, collaboration and communication skills were considered necessary for engaging with a variety of stakeholders while good digital skills were often needed for working in digital projects and capturing and communicating the impact of collections and related services.

Thinking again about the 2014 RLUK report (Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens, 2014, pp. 21, 31), there was an emphasis on the need to work more collaboratively with others within the institution and beyond and suggestions were made on how the skill set of collection professionals could be put to good use (e.g. in teaching). Based on the findings of this report, we can confirm that steps towards this direction have been taken by the majority of member institutions, while our results demonstrate that the image of special collection departments has been continuously transforming - from ‘closed’ spaces to hubs of creativity and innovation – and, hence, are in agreement with those of recent studies on the topic such as Tam’s (2017).
Yet, as part of supporting the changing role of collection professionals, institutions need to invest in skills and professional development for staff and ensure that job descriptions effectively communicate the variety of activities potential employees will need to be engaged in as well as the skills they should have. In addition, developing activities that are closely tied to the library’s goal will ensure that the time invested by staff members can be more easily justified, whereas institutional support will also prove valuable in this area. Finally, given the active participation of collection professionals in collaborative research projects, advocating for the inclusion of library staff members in funding applications as equal research partners will help towards bringing more recognition and reward to the library.

THE CHALLENGE OF CAPTURING AND TRACKING VALUE

Previous work in the area has shown that research libraries have been finding it challenging to collect evidence in a way that produces meaningful and trustworthy information around the use of collections (e.g. Cullingford, Peach, and Mertens, 2014, p. 30). According to the results of this project, most of participating RLUK members showed a good level of awareness with regards to how their collections were used within their institutions which made it easier for them to capture and showcase value. On the other hand, the majority of institutions reported difficulties in tracking and capturing the impact of collections when used for external projects, measuring long term impact of library resources and services or effectively evaluating the use of their digital resources.

Given the lack of structured methodologies for capturing types of evidence, such as research outputs, effectively and fully understanding the long term effect of libraries’ activities and resources, a collective response towards this challenge may be the way forward (e.g. collectively developing standardised ways of tracking and measuring value). A recent publication commissioned by RLUK, TNA and Jisc (2018), exploring ways to standardise references to unique and distinct collections (UDC’s) held in repositories across the UK, is an important step towards developing a better understanding of the impact that special collections and archives have on academic research and beyond. Additionally, research libraries may benefit from looking at the broader cultural heritage sector for relevant models and new ways of capturing and showcasing impact as organisations, such as museums, have a longer tradition of engaging in similar activities.

Regarding methodologies, it is also worth considering how quantitative and qualitative methods can be best combined to capture the different types of impact that concern libraries - academic and civic - since stakeholders, such as cultural heritage funders, may be interested in evidence that proves the impact of collections on a variety of areas, and not only on research. Additionally, qualitative methods are generally considered more appropriate for capturing and fully illustrating the effects of long term impact, such as change in practices and behaviour. Finally, advocating for a change in how collections are referenced (e.g. the provision of more specific information should be required) in research funding applications and publications will prove beneficial when it comes tracking down significance and impact (e.g. tracking...
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to further our understanding of the role that special collections and archives play in enabling institutions to meet their impact goals as well as investigate the ways that impact resulting from relevant services and activities is evidenced. Our findings showed that RLUK members frequently lead or participate in activities that aim to increase the impact of their collections and services and are highly interested in methods that enable them to capture and showcase their value and potential. A shift towards more audience-focused strategies is increasing collection professionals’ involvement in research, teaching and cross-institutional collaborations as well as public engagement activities while opening up special collections and archives and transforming their image.

Yet, as the shift towards openness is not even across institutions, there is still work to be done with regards to maximising opportunities for impact; improving discovery of conventional - especially uncatalogued - and digitised material is necessary in order to enhance the value of collections. Advocacy and lobbying are also required in order to communicate effectively the impact of unique and distinctive collections and bring recognition and reward back to the library. This will involve finding a solution to the issue of unsuitable terminology existing in many current definitions of impact that do not serve the goals of research libraries and fail to reveal the potential of collections and the importance of the contribution of staff members. The development of a common language around impact which is recognised by home institutions and other collection stakeholders can significantly facilitate the capturing and evidencing of value.

Moreover, although RLUK members already engage in activities with the purpose of tracking and measuring the value of their collections, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, such as the need for more structured methodologies to capture the long term impact of collections or better understand how collections and digital resources are used outside institutions. Finally, investing in skills development for staff will not only support collection professionals in their continuously evolving roles, but ultimately also support the library’s aim to increase the reach and impact of its unique and distinctive collections. To conclude, this report suggests that both institutional and collective effort will be required to tackle the challenges associated with impact; regarding the collective response, RLUK, through the recently developed ‘Special Collections Programme’ (SCP) and its networks, offers suitable ground for discussion and debate around these issues that can lead to solutions that will benefit library collections and their audiences.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES


RLUK Special Collections Programme Survey -
Evidencing the Impact and Value of Special
Collections

This survey is part of a project designed by RLUK in the context of its Special Collections Programme (SCP) which aims to explore and better understand the approaches employed by RLUK members and close partners for capturing and measuring impact through special collections and archives. The results of this survey will be used as part of an RLUK report on the topic which will be shared with everyone.

* Required

1. The information provided by you in this questionnaire will be anonymised and will be used by RLUK for research purposes. You can read our Data Protection Policy at http://www.rluk.ac.uk/data-protection-policy/. *

Check all that apply.

☐ I understand and agree to continue.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

2. Please mention the library you work for. *

________________________________________________________________________________________

3. What is your role in the library? *

________________________________________________________________________________________

4. Please describe what types of special collection/archive materials you hold (include information about format, such as physical or digital, and subject/topic). (max. 200 words) *

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

5. How do you define impact in your institution (library or university)? (max. 200 words) *
6. *What are your main audience groups?*

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Academics/Researchers
- [ ] University Students
- [ ] General Public
- [ ] Other:

7. *Please provide any extra comments you may have around your users/audiences here.* (max. 150 words)


8. *Do you engage regularly in activities that aim to increase the impact of your special/archival collections?*

Mark only one oval.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other:

9. *If yes, what types of initiatives are these? Types of activities/projects can include new spaces, exhibitions and other public engagement programmes, research and teaching collaborations.* (max. 300 words)


10. *Can you name a recent project/initiative that was based on part(s) of these collections and was considered successful by your institution in terms of increased impact and value? (include web link if relevant) (max. 200 words)*
11. What was the purpose of the project/initiative? (max. 200 words)

12. Why did you engage in this project/initiative and why do you think it was successful? (max. 200 words)

13. What were the benefits and challenges of engaging in this project/initiative? (max. 300 words)

14. Any other comments. (max. 150 words)

15. Do you have any method(s) for measuring the impact of project/initiatives, such as those mentioned above, that are led by the library? If 'yes', please provide any relevant information (e.g. practices, benefits, challenges, staff members responsible for that). (max. 300 words) *
16. If 'no', please provide any further comments you may have (e.g. future plans for measuring the impact of your special/archival collections or problems in doing so). (max. 300 words)

17. Can you think of someone else in your institution (outside the library) and beyond that works on a project(s) based on your special/archival collections? If yes, how do you learn about these projects? (max. 300 words) *

18. Do you have any method(s) of capturing the outputs of projects/initiatives that use part of your special/archival collections but are led by others? If 'yes', please provide any relevant information (e.g. practices, benefits, challenges, staff members responsible for that). (max. 300 words) *

19. If 'no', please provide any further comments you may have (e.g. future plans for capturing such outputs or problems in doing so). (max. 300 words)

20. Do you have any other ideas about ways to better capture and measure the impact of activities around special/archival collections (led by the library or by others)? (max. 300 words) *
21. Any other comments about your institution’s approach to capturing and measuring the impact of projects/initiatives based on your special/archival collections. (max. 200 words)
APPENDIX II - SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES

Selected examples of successful initiatives provided by the survey participants which have been led by research libraries or where libraries have been key partners through their collections and provision of related services:

- Queen Mary University of London Library - Festival of Communities, https://www.qmul.ac.uk/festival/.
- Queen’s University Belfast Library - RASCAL, http://www.rascal.ac.uk/.
- University of Glasgow Library - Library World war one commemoration, https://www.gla.ac.uk/events/ww1/.
- University of Leicester Library - Joe Orton: 50 Years On, https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/english/research/joe-orton-50-years-on-1.
APPENDIX III - TOOLS FOR EVALUATION AND TRACKING IMPACT

Examples of tools for measuring and evaluating the impact of collections and related services provided by the survey participants:


