

## **Survey of Access to Collections Specific Expertise:**

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# **1. Introduction and Context**

This document has been produced by Renaissance Yorkshire's Museum Development Team on behalf of the Yorkshire Museum Director's Conference (YMDC).

In September 2011, the Yorkshire Museum Directors Conference identified that collections in the region are at an increased risk of becoming 'orphaned'. This is due to the current and potential impact of reductions in public spending. YMDC was keen to identify where there are already sub-regional or regional gaps in collections specific expertise. YMDC also wanted to know which types of collection are at risk of becoming orphaned.

In this context, YMDC sought to focus on collections that, whilst ownership is unambiguous, lack access to the specialist knowledge necessary to ensure their active use and enjoyment. Specifically this was felt to relate to a lack of in-house expertise or resources.

YMDC does recognise that some well maintained collections do not always require full time specialist support. This exercise sought to understand the sub-regional and regional implications of local management decisions.

It is YMDC's intention that this information be used to inform the business plans of individual museums and to provide data for funding bids or programmes.

## **2. Methodology**

The information presented in this survey was drawn from an online survey. A copy of the survey is available in Appendix A.

On 27<sup>th</sup> September Richard Butterfield, Chair of YMDC, circulated via email an invitation to participate in an online survey. This email was sent to all YMDC members representing 53 organisations. Some organisations received more than one invitation. Recipients were instructed to respond by 5pm on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

One organisation submitted a partial return and a complete return. Following consultation, the data was migrated into a single record.

No returns were received from any National Museum that is part of the National Museums Directors Conference. No return was received from five services that receive funding from Unitary Authorities.

A total of 22 individual organisations completed the survey, of which 18 answered every question. Whilst this represents 41% of the target population, the margin of error in this survey is high. This is due to the small size of the population and the low number of participants. As a consequence the data should be considered as indicative.

### 3. Current Situation

#### 3.1 Specialisms at Risk

The survey indicates that there are a limited number of collection areas where there are a very small number of salaried specialist posts.

Specialism	Salaried specialist post in 2011-12
Archaeology	7
Archives (incl. digital media, film, photo and sound)	7
Decorative and applied art	5
Fine art	8
Industry and commerce (incl. Agriculture)	5
Scientific collections - Natural history	3
Scientific collections - Other	0
Social history	10
Transport and maritime	2
Warfare, defence, weapons and accessories	2
World Cultures	4
Collections care specialist	8
Registrar	7
Other	1

Whilst sub-regional variations exist, more than 25% of respondents have a salaried specialist covering the following collection areas:

- Archaeology
- Archives
- Fine art
- Social history
- Collections care
- Registrar

At present it is not considered that these specialisms are at risk in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Projections for 2012-13 also suggest little variation in these figures in the short term. The exception to this is archaeology at a sub-regional level. Whilst archaeology is well served regionally, only one respondent from South Yorkshire had a specialist salaried officer with a remit for archaeology.

It is known that some collections types receive support from non-specialist officers. These are officers whose remit covers a number of subject specialisms but who are expert in one or two fields. It is likely that some subject areas might not be as well served as the data implies.

Although the survey suggests that there are only two salaried specialists covering transport and maritime; and warfare, defence, weapons and

accessories, neither of these disciplines are considered at risk. In both of these instances, there are central government funded National Museums within the region that employ a number of subject specific curators and specialists. There are also a number of Regimental Museums that have access to expertise from their associated regiment(s).

Specialisms that appear to be at particular risk of being lost to the region are:

- Decorative and applied art (5 services with specialism)<sup>1</sup>
- Industry and commerce (incl. Agriculture) (5 services with specialism)
- Scientific collections - Natural history (3 services with specialism)<sup>2</sup>
- Scientific collections – Other (0 services with specialism)
- World Cultures (4 services with specialism)<sup>3</sup>

Considerable care should be taken if services are minded to reduce expertise in any of these areas. There is a risk through natural wastage and churn that the above subject specialisms could be lost to the region. There could, however, be opportunities to deploy the expertise of particular officers to organisations that currently have no access to collections specific expertise. This could help mitigate the impact of future losses.

### **3.2 Access to Collections Specific Expertise**

In general, a high proportion of museums are currently able to ensure that their collections have access to subject expertise. At the moment, very few collections can be considered to be 'orphaned'. There are however a number of areas for future concern.

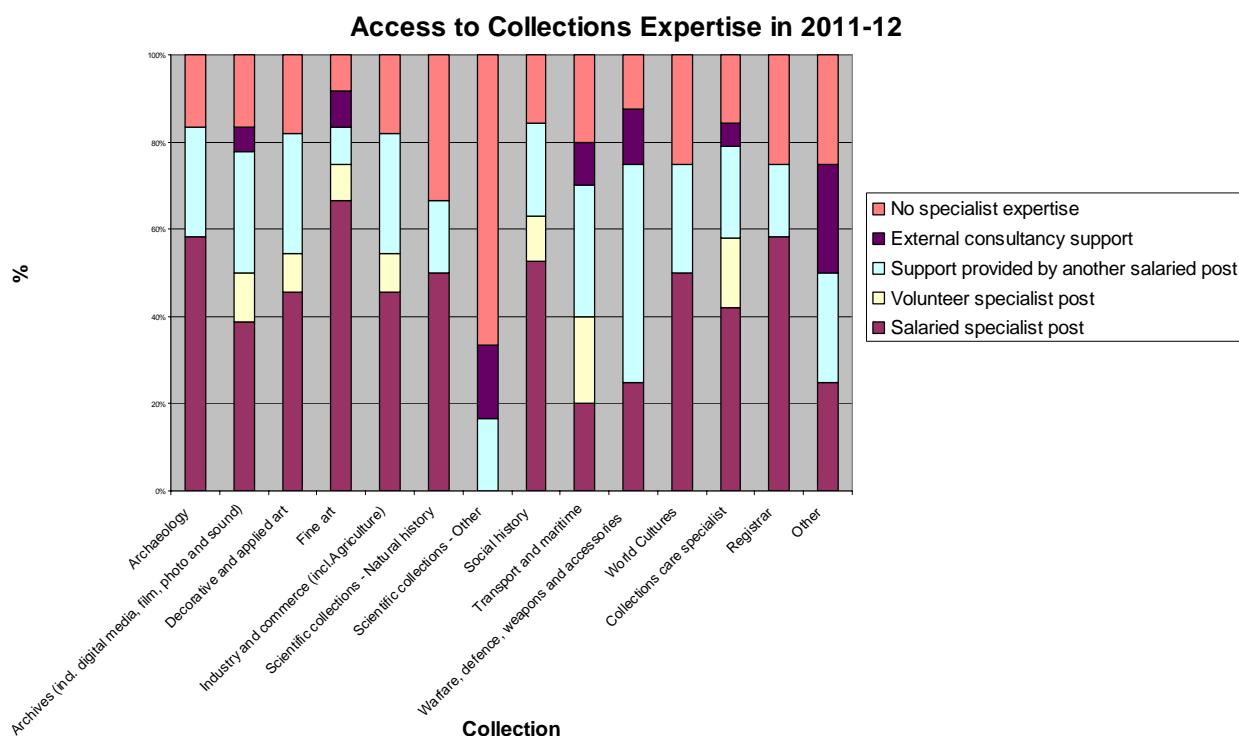
Whilst a number of museums reported that access to collections specific expertise is provided by 'another salaried post', anecdotal information suggests that this might often be a desired state. A number of museums reported that time and workload pressures prevented officers from dedicating time to collections about which they had expertise. This suggests that on a day to day basis more collections will lack access to specific expertise than modelling implies.

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Decorative and Applied Art might be at lower risk of losing its specialism as two large non-participant museums are known to have curators covering these areas.

<sup>2</sup> Two large non-participant museums are known to have curators covering this area.

<sup>3</sup> One large non-participant museum is known to have curators covering this area.



At present, there are only two collection areas where >25% of respondents reported having 'no specialist expertise', 'Scientific collections - Natural history' and 'Scientific collections – other'. These collections could require additional attention at a strategic level.

Two additional factors are apparent that reduce access to expertise:

- Museums in Yorkshire make limited use of specialist volunteers
- Museums in Yorkshire make limited use of specialist consultancy support

It is also surprising that few respondents made reference to special interest groups or Subject Specialist Networks. Only one respondent referred to a local scientific society and two respondents referred to partnership working with the Yorkshire Medium Sized Museums Network. A number of special interest groups, particularly in Natural Sciences, were established in the 1960's and '70's to address challenges around access to collections specific expertise. The Museums Libraries and Archives Council also invested in a number of Subject Specialist Networks in 2004-5 and 2006-7 as part of the Renaissance programme. The lack of awareness and use of this infrastructure by museum services will limit access to specialist expertise.



The following collections are considered 'at risk' of losing access to specialist support.

% of those with collection 2011-12	Salaried specialist post	Volunteer specialist post	Support provided by another salaried post	External consultancy support	No specialist expertise
<b>Scientific collections - Natural history</b>	50%	0%	17%	0%	33%
<b>Scientific collections - Other</b>	0%	0%	17%	17%	67%
<b>Transport and maritime</b>	20%	20%	30%	10%	20%
<b>Warfare, defence, weapons and accessories</b>	25%	0%	50%	13%	13%
<b>World Cultures</b>	50%	0%	25%	0%	25%

Based on the data above, the following conclusions can be made:

- 'Other' scientific collections struggle to gain access to specialist support
  - The majority of such collections have no access to expertise
  - 50% of such collections that have access to expertise are reliant on pre-existing skills within the museum
  - The sector needs to define what specific collections this category includes
- The coverage of natural history expertise is limited and there is a danger of access to expertise being lost
  - There are currently specialists in North, West and South Yorkshire and Humberside but these are often singleton posts
- Transport and maritime collections are heavily reliant on the expertise of pre-existing members of staff which poses a risk through natural churn and wastage
  - The situation is not as challenging as it initially appears due to the presence of the National Railway Museum which reduces the risk to railway and coach related collections
- Warfare, defence, weapons and accessories are at lower risk of losing access to specialist expertise due to the regional strength of the Ministry of Defence (Regiments) and the presence of the Royal Armouries
  - Half of all collections are supported by non-specialist posts which could become problematic in future years if these individuals are lost
- World cultures collections are at significant risk of losing access to specialist support

- There are only five known specialist curators of world culture collections<sup>4</sup> in Yorkshire and the Humber which places access to expertise at risk
- A quarter of all respondents stated that their collection did not benefit from specialist support.

It should also be noted that some types of collection are highly localised and might require a greater degree of subject expertise. Natural history, decorative art and industrial heritage can, for example, require detailed local knowledge due to geographic peculiarities. Other collections, such as fine art or world cultures, do not always require such nuanced locally specific knowledge.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

- Few collections in the region are currently without an opportunity to access to specialist support
- Museums in Yorkshire make limited use of specialist volunteers
- Museums in Yorkshire make limited use of specialist consultancy support
- Museums in Yorkshire make limited use of special interest groups or Subject Specialist Networks
- Further research is needed to identify what collections have been grouped under 'Scientific collections – Other' and 'Social history'
- It is possible that some collections areas could be coded into multiple categories
- Some collections are highly localised and can be difficult to understand within a general typology
- There is an issue about non-specialist officers providing appropriate levels of support to particular collections. At best this could be due to limitations of capacity, flexibility, versatility or confidence. At worst it suggests a lack of basic broad skills amongst museum professionals in the region
- Due to the number of specialist posts, high risk collections are:
  - Decorative and applied art
  - Industry and commerce (incl. Agriculture)
  - Scientific collections - Natural history
  - Scientific collections – Other
  - World Cultures
- South Yorkshire only has one specialist post for archaeology
- If support from DCMS funded National museums and organisations financed through the MoD is not forthcoming, the following collections could be considered at risk:
  - Transport and maritime
  - Warfare, defence, weapons and accessories

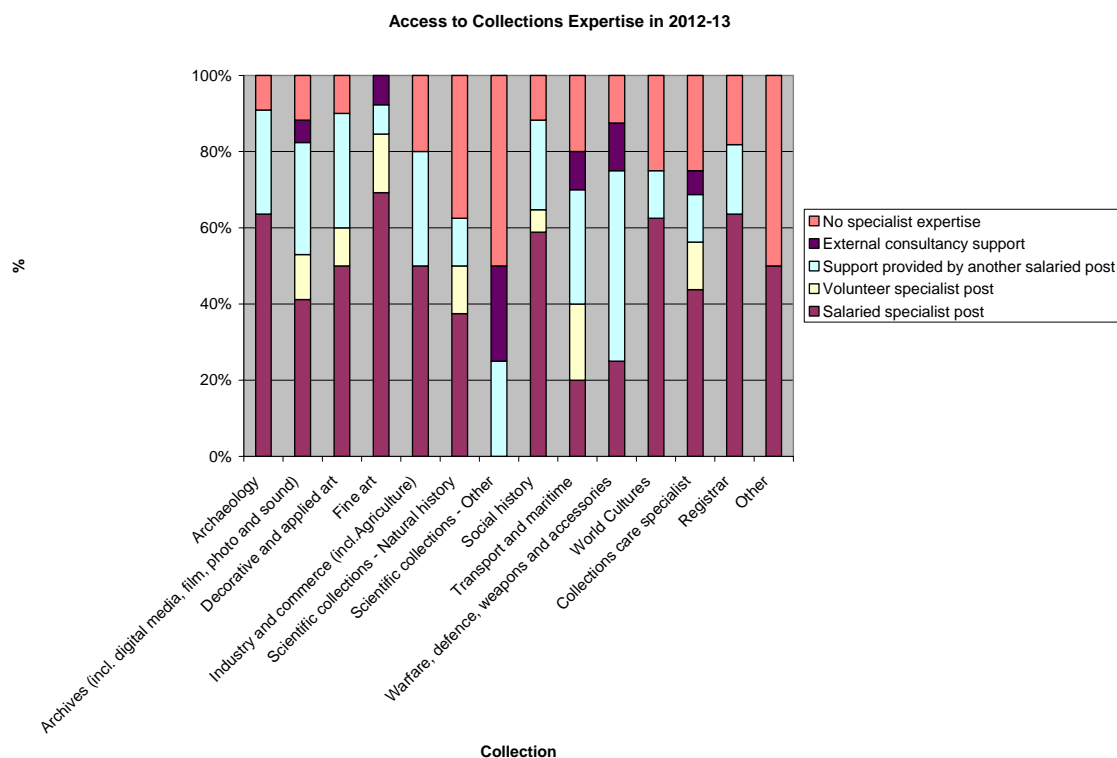
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<sup>4</sup> One major service that did not respond to the survey is known to have a specialist curator.

## 4. Future Situation

At present a number of museums are unable to project with confidence how access to specialist collections support will be obtained beyond 2012-13. This is potentially a considerable challenge for organisations across the region.

Organisations responding to the survey do not anticipate major changes between 2011-12 and 2013-14. Where changes appear in the dataset, this is largely to do with issues around constant sample and data entry errors.



Unfortunately, the scenario post 2013 looks far less certain and it is in this period that collections specific expertise could be lost. Out of the respondents providing information related to this period:

- 22% anticipated a decline in access to collections expertise
- 22% were unable to make a projection due to forthcoming reviews and budget settlements
- 56% anticipated no change or a slight increase in access to collections expertise
  - 43% were 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations
  - 57% were funded by Local Government or other parts of the public sector

Previous research by YMDC suggests that the optimism expressed above might be misplaced and the risk to collections expertise is much higher. Key findings from this exercise were:

- At least £5.1m will be lost from the annual budget of museums in Yorkshire by 2014

- Many museums expect further cuts to come both before and after 2013/14
- By 2014, public sector investment in museums across Yorkshire will be at 80-83% of the resources allocated for 2010-11
- Public spending reductions disproportionately impact front line museum services due to size of fixed costs such as rent and utility bills
  - 8-9% cut to LA budgets in 2011-12 equated to a 15% reduction in FTE – a multiplier of 1.88

It is unrealistic to assume that a budget cut of 20-25% will not impact access to collections specific expertise. It is also possible that services currently projecting a smaller than average budget reduction could be asked to find additional savings. This is due to the high rate of CPI inflation and lower projected growth of GDP combined with the projected receipts from taxation.<sup>5</sup> The only alternative to reducing access to collections specific expertise would be to transfer the savings onto directly public facing activities such as education and outreach.

It is important to ensure that any reduction in collections specific expertise is done strategically to ensure that services and the region as a whole retains excellence where is both needed and sustainable. Failure to engage with this matter in the short-term in the hope that spending cuts can be managed in-house could result in the medium term deterioration of collections. Where this cannot be managed, services might need to consider the disposal of collections assets to organisations better able to cope with their requirements.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/public\\_finances\\_databank.xls](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/public_finances_databank.xls)

## 5. Recommendations

### 5.1 YMDC

1. YMDC should not over exaggerate the loss of collections expertise; few collections are currently orphaned and there *should* be little change until 2014. This issue is a 'future risk' and not an immediate challenge
2. YMDC should stress that the retention of specific collections expertise *must* be balanced by the requirement to provide public access through exhibitions, activities and programmes - A 'well managed' collection with poor public access is unlikely to attract or retain public, private or 3<sup>rd</sup> sector investment
3. YMDC to explore opportunities for making better sub or cross-regional use of the following specialisms to create a business case for their retention within the area:
  - a. Decorative and applied art
  - b. Industry and commerce (incl. Agriculture)
  - c. Scientific collections - Natural history
  - d. Scientific collections – Other
  - e. World Cultures
4. YMDC to explore opportunities for services to collaborate to add strength to pre-existing Designated collections or to create applications for new, collaboratively managed, Designated collections
5. YMDC to facilitate the establishment of cross-service significance assessments to allow for the strategic management of collections
6. YMDC to consider identifying the scope of collections categorised as 'Scientific collections – Other' and 'Social history'

### 5.2 YMDC Members

7. Museum services to explore how they can embed broader collections management skills within their existing workforce alongside pre-existing specialisms. If services have to remove specialisms, it is essential that remaining staff/volunteers understand the basic requirements of a broad range of collection types
8. Museums *must* prioritise the removal of documentation backlogs to SPECTRUM minimum standards to allow for the management of collections from a position of knowledge
9. Museums to consider undertaking high level collections significance reviews to further improve strategic resource management

10. Museums to consider which elements of their collections require detailed 'local' knowledge as opposed to a generalised understanding
11. Museums to identify whether collections specific expertise is required to facilitate access to collections, or to develop knowledge about them
12. Museums to explore opportunities for collaboration with (Renaissance) Major Grant recipients focussing on collection specialisms
13. Museums to identify which collections are (or should be) closed to new acquisitions and stored on a maintenance basis
14. Museums to identify which collections should be prepared for disposal
15. Museums to explore, individually or in partnership, opportunities to attract external investment for collections focussed programmes
16. Museums to explore how collections specific expertise could be gained from:
  - a. Specialist volunteers
  - b. Special interest groups or Subject Specialist Networks
  - c. Commissioning specialist collections management services from other museum organisations (including collaborative management models)
  - d. Commissioning specialist consultancy support (perhaps using a consortia model) from the private sector
  - e. Specialist consultants on the basis of a long-term relationship to allow for local collections specific knowledge to be developed
  - f. Universities – to research collections and create public facing content

## Appendix A: Copy of Survey

Survey of Access to Collections Specific Expertise	
<b>Introduction</b>	
<p>In September 2011, the Yorkshire Museum Directors Conference (YMDC) identified that collections in the region are at an increased risk of becoming orphaned. This is due to the current and potential impact of reductions in public spending. YMDC is keen to identify where there are already sub-regional or regional gaps in collections specific expertise. YMDC also wants to know which types of collection are at risk of becoming orphaned.</p> <p>In this context, YMDC is focusing on collections that, whilst ownership is unambiguous, lack access to the specialist knowledge necessary to ensure their active use and enjoyment. Specifically this relates to a lack of in-house expertise or resources.</p> <p>It is recognised that some well maintained collections do not always require full time specialist support. This survey is trying to understand the sub-regional and regional implications of local management decisions.</p> <p>Please could you complete this survey by 5pm 4th October 2011. The survey consists of 2 multiple choice questions and an optional narrative. It will take no more than 5 minutes to complete.</p> <p>Information provided by museums will be made available to other museum related organisations in the region, government agencies (e.g. ACE) and key sector stakeholders.</p> <p>This initiative is being supported by Renaissance Yorkshire's Museum Development Team.</p>	
<b>*1. Organisation and Contact Details</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Organisation:</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Email Address:</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Phone Number:</b>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Current Situation</b>	
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## Survey of Access to Collections Specific Expertise

**\*2. This survey seeks to identify current and future orphaned collections. Please answer according to your actual position.**

**The headings used to identify collection types are high level and not detailed. Please answer as best you can. If your museum has specific collections that need to be identified separately, please do so in the comment box.**

**This survey is focusing primarily on the specifications of particular posts as opposed to the skills of individuals. Similarly, 'consultancy' could include both paid for advice as well as support levered in through skills sharing initiatives/agreements.**

**Please select all options that apply to your organisation in September 2011.**

	Not applicable	Salaried specialist post	Volunteer specialist post	Support provided by another salaried post	External consultancy support	No specialist expertise
Archaeology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Archives (incl. digital media, film, photo and sound)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decorative and applied art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fine art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industry and commerce (incl. Agriculture)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scientific collections - Natural history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scientific collections - Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport and maritime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warfare, defence, weapons and accessories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
World Cultures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collections care specialist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Registrar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

**Forecast for 2012-13**



## Survey of Access to Collections Specific Expertise

**3. Please select all options that you believe will apply to your organisation in April 2012.**

**Please be aware of the HR and legal implications of answering this question.**

	Not applicable	Salaried specialist post	Volunteer specialist post	Support provided by another salaried post	External consultancy support	No specialist expertise
Archaeology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Archives (incl. digital media, film, photo and sound)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decorative and applied art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fine art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industry and commerce (incl. Agriculture)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scientific collections - Natural history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scientific collections - Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social history	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport and maritime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Warfare, defence, weapons and accessories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
World Cultures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collections care specialist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Registrar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

## Forecast for 2013-14

**4. Please outline your anticipated scenario for collections specific expertise in 2013/14.**

## Comment

Thank you for participating in this survey.

A summary of the findings will be emailed to you within one month of the deadline for submissions.

If you have any additional comments please use the box below.

## Survey of Access to Collections Specific Expertise

### 5. Comment:

