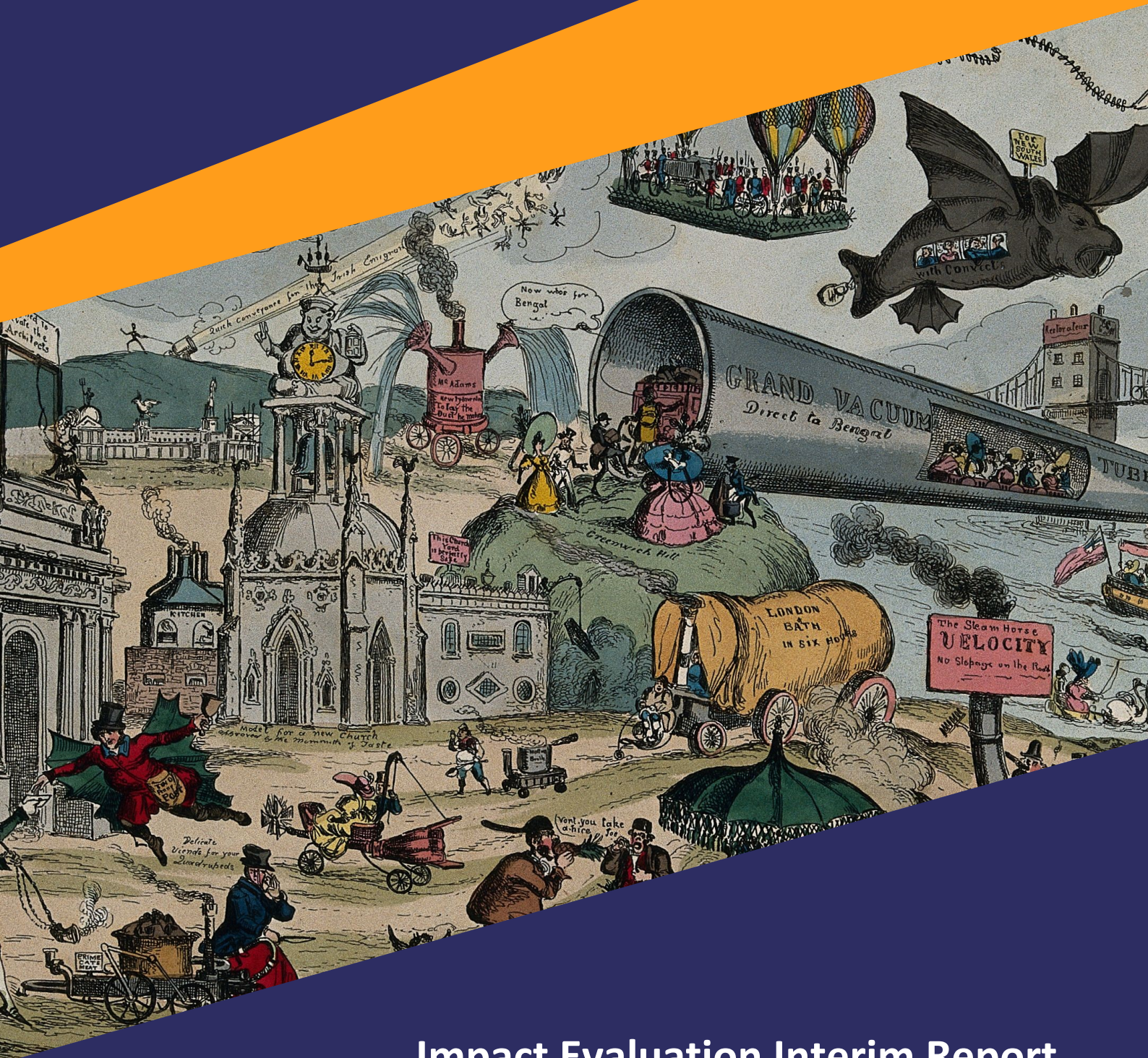


# COMMISSIONED REPORT



## Impact Evaluation Interim Report

Diffley Partnership

August 2023

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Context .....	1
Methodology .....	1
Interim findings- impacts for cultural heritage organisations.....	1
Interim findings – impacts for collections and their audiences .....	2
Interim findings – impacts of digital collections research ecosystem.....	2
Interim findings – evaluation participant feedback and suggestions.....	3
Next steps .....	4
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Context of TaNC</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 Funding .....	7
2.2 Aims and objectives of TaNC .....	7
2.3 Projects .....	8
2.4 Programme-level initiatives .....	9
2.5 External Influences.....	10
2.6 Timeline .....	10
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3.1 Evaluation approach .....	11
3.2 Theory of Change Model.....	11
3.3 Secondary analysis .....	11
3.4 Engagement sessions .....	12
3.5 Sector survey .....	13
<b>4. Interim Findings – Impacts for Cultural Heritage Organisations</b> .....	<b>14</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	14
4.2 Policy and strategy .....	15

4.3 Digital capacity, capability and skills.....	16
4.4 Ambitions for growth and development of digital collections.....	18
4.5 Conclusion .....	19
<b>5. Interim Findings – Impacts for Collections and their Audiences .....</b>	<b>21</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	21
5.2 Begin to dissolve barriers between different collections.....	21
5.3 Extend researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location...	24
5.4 Benefit a diverse range of audiences .....	25
5.5 Open up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research ....	27
5.6 Conclusion .....	28
<b>6. Interim Findings – Impacts for Digital Collections Research Ecosystem..</b>	<b>29</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	29
6.2 Be active and of benefit across the UK.....	29
6.3 Partnerships between academic and cultural heritage sectors .....	30
6.4 Building a community with a shared vision .....	32
6.5 Provide clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward.....	33
6.6 Conclusion .....	34
<b>7. Key considerations from interim evaluation stage.....</b>	<b>36</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	36
7.2 Views on objectives and aim .....	36
7.3 Feedback on programme .....	39
7.4 Participant suggestions for remaining programme period .....	43
7.5 Participant suggestions for beyond the programme period .....	45
7.6 Conclusion .....	51

<b>8. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix A: Programme Evaluation Theory of Change Model.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix B: Reference List for Desk Research.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix C: Engagement Sessions Discussion Guide .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Appendix D: TaNC Projects .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Appendix E: Research participants- Survey respondents .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Appendix F: Sector Survey .....</b>	<b>73</b>

# Executive Summary

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## Context

This report was commissioned by the Towards a National Collection (TaNC) Programme Directorate of the appointed TaNC programme evaluator, the Diffley Partnership. This is an interim evaluation report containing findings for the period up to 27 July 2023. As such, the report analyses and distils the Phase 1 findings. These are primarily based on secondary sources, engagement sessions with people involved in completed TaNC projects, and a cultural heritage sector survey.

A second phase of this evaluation will commence in June 2024, concluding and reporting by end of November 2024.

## Methodology

A theory of change (ToC) was developed to aid this evaluation, showing how change happens in the short, medium and long term to achieve the intended impact.

Findings summarised in this Executive Summary are drawn from a combination of all evaluation methods:

- **Desk research** – published and unpublished materials on TaNC
- Five **engagement sessions** were designed to hear from those involved in completed TaNC projects. Sixteen individuals took part in engagement sessions, eleven from Foundation Projects and five from COVID-19 Projects.
- An **online survey** for the cultural heritage sector was live from 22 June to 19 July. This achieved 193 responses, 32 of which cited direct involvement with TaNC's programme and/or a project.

## Interim findings- impacts for cultural heritage organisations

Survey respondents involved in TaNC projects were most positive that TaNC:

- Helped us develop collaborations with other organisations.
- Helped us improve working across different disciplines.
- Helped us to be innovative.
- Helped us engage with public audiences.
- Helped us develop partnerships with the higher education sector.

Views were more mixed that TaNC:

- Helped us improve digital search of collections records.
- Helped skills development in our organisation.

And were more negative in their view that TaNC:

- Helped our organisation improve our digital policy and strategy.

- Helped our organisation improve our digital capacity and capability.

For digital policy and strategy, other evaluation sources showed that this was highly dependent on organisational contexts. However, there was an expectation that TaNC would advance policy and strategy discussions at a UK level, with benefits to organisations.

Evidence was found that TaNC is developing skills within project teams. However, there are wider challenges with digital capacity and capability within the cultural heritage sector. The evaluation revealed that there is a limited pool of specialists for TaNC to harness and utilise in projects.

In terms of growth and development of digital collections, this was found to be a motivation for getting involved in TaNC and a desire fuelled further by involvement in TaNC. Participants expected more benefits to come through the Discovery Projects and the legacy of TaNC.

## Interim findings – impacts for collections and their audiences

TaNC was found to be making progress towards dissolving barriers between different collections:

- In some ways challenges within projects were highlighted as just as important, if not more important than successes.
- The experience of taking part in TaNC projects resulted in more consideration of whether, and of how, collections records can be brought together.

At the same time, TaNC was seen to have a positive benefit **for extending access beyond physical boundaries**, in terms of digital access:

- This was accompanied, however, by the caveat that this benefit will depend on how applicable solutions developed within TaNC projects prove to be in ‘real life’.

It was difficult to establish if TaNC was **benefitting a diverse range of audiences**:

- Partly this was due to this being an indirect impact from outputs developed.
- Largely, because visitor studies and digital analytics data was not available.

There was strong evidence that TaNC is achieving cross-disciplinary and cross collections research.

- This was built into TaNC project funding and was praised by evaluation participants.

## Interim findings – impacts of digital collections research ecosystem

In terms of TaNC benefits reaching across the UK:

- This was evidenced by the number of partner organisations based in different UK locations.
- Due to the set up with Independent Research Organisation (IRO) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) these were consequently based in large population centres.
- There were clearly efforts to include organisations, and people, based in as many parts of the UK as possible.

TaNC is advancing partnerships between the academic and cultural heritage sectors as follows:

- There was evidence of TaNC creating a reason for new relationships as well as TaNC benefitting from existing partnerships.
- TaNC brought the rewarding, but somewhat challenging, nature of partnership working to organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of **building a community with a shared vision**, the interim evaluation revealed:

- There is clearly an appetite for the cultural heritage sector to create and articulate such a vision.
- It is unclear at this stage whether parts of the sector – that is to say museums or libraries or archives – see this as shared at the sub-sector level or the GLAM sector level.
- Certainly, learnings from TaNC were seen as useful to inform a shared vision and way forward in meaningful digital developments.

Another objective of TaNC was to **advance the case for enhanced funding**. Findings were as follows:

- Already at this interim stage progress is being made in this regard.
- Those involved in completed TaNC projects are trying, and sometimes succeeding, in securing greater internal budgets or external investment to build on outputs they developed.
- There was a feeling that TaNC existing actually evidences the appetite and necessity for investment in this area at UK and international levels.

## Interim findings – evaluation participant feedback and suggestions

Crucially, the sector survey showed broad and strong support for all of TaNC's objectives and evidenced broader interest in the results of TaNC beyond those directly involved in projects.

The sector survey indicated that the TaNC objective with the highest level of importance was 'benefitting a diverse range of audiences'. The survey also indicated that TaNC has most potential to improve where this objective is concerned – however, it should be noted that this was based on a small sub-sample of individuals involved in projects.

Feedback on the programme from various sources included opinions on the aim and objectives of TaNC and their suitability and achievability. Furthermore, feedback was given on TaNC funding processes, formation of projects and attempts to encourage connections and networking.

Participant suggestions for the remaining programme period included brokering connections between individuals and organisations, as well as ways for TaNC to extend the reach and accessibility of findings. TaNC was encouraged to lead discussions on ways forward for digital collections and to remember to support the building of legacy. Suggestions relevant to beyond the period of TaNC related to skills development, digitisation and data, and ensuring inclusivity.

## Next steps

The report ends with recommendations based on the evaluation analysis to date. It is intended to inform the TaNC Programme Directorate and Steering Committee towards the remainder of the programme. In addition, the contents have relevance beyond TaNC, towards future initiatives and investment concerning digital developments in the cultural heritage sector. The evaluation research will recommence in June 2024 until end of contract period 20 November 2024. This later research will culminate in the Phase 2 evaluation report.



# 1. Introduction

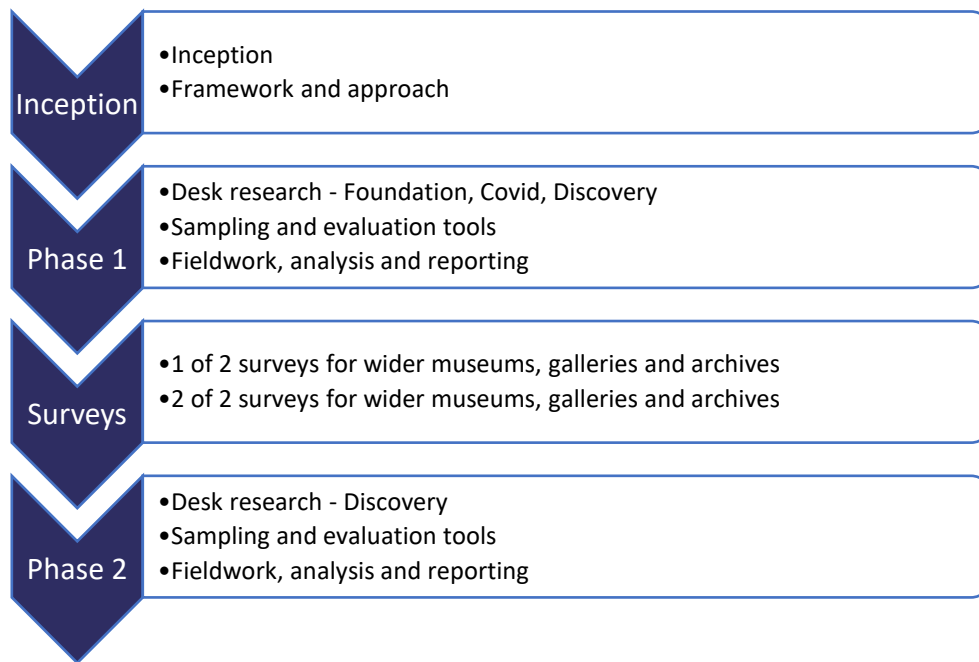
As with any programme evaluation, it is crucial to understand what has worked well, areas for development and learning which can go towards this programme and future efforts. TaNC’s evaluation was commissioned towards: ‘Building a compelling case for funding beyond the current five-year programme to support UK digital collections research infrastructure’.

As a minimum, the evaluation was commissioned to assess TaNC’s impact on cultural institutions’:

- policy and strategy,
- digital capacity and capability,
- and ambitions for growth and development of their digital collections.

It will also assess TaNC’s effectiveness at:

- promoting interdisciplinary working,
- developing partnerships between the academic and cultural heritage sectors, building a community with a shared vision.



**Figure 1.1: Evaluation Phases**

Diffley Partnership developed an evaluation approach in phases (see figure 1.1), including a Theory of Change (ToC) model (see section 3.2).

The research towards this Phase 1 interim evaluation report was undertaken between award of contract on 6 March 2023 to 27 July 2023. This is the interim point, where it is expedient to analyse and distil the Phase 1 findings to inform policy recommendations, as well as any recommendations for adjustments within the remainder of the programme.

This report opens with a brief chapter on key context on TaNC, relevant for this evaluation. The next chapter provides details of the evaluation approach, methodology, fieldwork and analysis.

Chapters four, five and six contain interim findings for the impact of TaNC at an interim stage. These are organised under impacts for: cultural heritage organisations; collections and their audiences; digital collections research ecosystem.

Chapter seven contains key considerations from the interim evaluation stage, including perceptions of TaNC's progress towards its original objectives, feedback on the programme and suggestions for TaNC and endeavours beyond TaNC.

The culmination in chapter eight is a list of recommendations from the evaluators, based on the evaluation analysis. These are intended to boost the positive impacts of TaNC and are for the consideration of TaNC Programme Directorate and Steering Committee.

The evaluation research will recommence in June 2024 until the end of the contract period on 20 November 2024. This later research will culminate in the Phase 2 findings and Evaluation Report.

## 2. Context of TaNC

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### 2.1 Funding

The UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) has funded 34 programmes involving multi- and interdisciplinary research organised under eight themes:<sup>1</sup>

- environment
- biology and biomedicine
- artificial intelligence
- productivity
- infrastructure
- health, wellbeing and human rights
- digital
- productivity and technical

TaNC was awarded £18.9 million within the digital theme of SPF. It is delivered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and supported by the UK government's Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and AHRC's independent research organisations.<sup>2</sup>

TaNC was awarded to run from 2020 to 2025 with a list of partners involved, including AHRC.<sup>3</sup> The scope and activities were described as follows:<sup>4</sup>

'By seizing the opportunity presented by new digital technology, it will allow researchers to:

- formulate radically new research questions
- increase visitor numbers
- dramatically expand and diversify virtual access to our heritage, and
- bring clear economic, social and health benefits to communities across the UK.

The innovation driven by the programme will maintain the UK's world leadership in digital humanities and set global standards in the field.'

### 2.2 Aims and objectives of TaNC

The objectives of TaNC are to:

- begin to dissolve barriers between different collections,
- open up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research,
- extend researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location,
- benefit a diverse range of audiences,

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<sup>1</sup> [Strategic Priorities Fund – UKRI](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Strategic Priorities Fund – UKRI](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Towards a national collection – opening UK heritage to the world – UKRI](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Towards a national collection – opening UK heritage to the world – UKRI](#)

- be active and of benefit across the UK,
- provide clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward.<sup>5</sup>

TaNC was set out to have a transformative impact on:

- digital search and cataloguing tools for collections, and related technologies and methodologies.
- research capability: through enhanced researcher access and new cross-collection search tools, researchers will be able to exploit the potential of the nation's research assets in innovative ways, addressing radically new research questions and thereby maintaining UK global leadership in inter-disciplinary research.
- public access and public engagement with heritage: the programme will generate research-driven public-facing outputs, including major new exhibitions and immersive installations; extend public access beyond collections' physical location, nationally and internationally; and facilitate wider and better-informed public engagement.

In this report, we usually use the terms 'cultural heritage sector' and 'cultural heritage organisations' to refer to the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector and institutions, in reference to such institutions' work to 'collect and maintain cultural heritage materials in the public interest.'<sup>6</sup>

## 2.3 Projects

TaNC's competitive funding calls for Foundation Projects and Discovery Projects were planned from the outset. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, another call was added for COVID-19 Urgency Projects (hereafter named as COVID-19 Projects).

Three COVID-19 Projects were awarded, with the first starting in January 2021 and all completed by March 2022. Projects were selected to provide a critical and time-sensitive evaluation of the digital practice undertaken by museums during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide scalable lessons to inform future museum practice as well as the overall TaNC programme.

Eight small-scale Foundation Projects began in February 2020 and all were completed by July 2022. The projects aimed to lay the foundations for a virtual national collection by identifying and addressing the current or future challenges facing the formation of such a collection. Each project is a collaboration between at least one Independent Research Organisation (IRO) and one Higher Education Institution and includes relevant non-IRO organisations.

Five major Discovery Projects began in October 2021 and are ongoing at the time of this interim evaluation. These extend across the UK, involving 15 universities and 63 heritage collections and institutions of different scales, with over 120 individual researchers and collaborators. These aimed to research and develop emerging technologies, including machine learning and citizen-led archiving, in order to connect the UK's cultural artefacts and historical archives in new and transformative ways.

Projects were carried out by a combination of organisations including:

- UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs),

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<sup>5</sup> [Towards a National Collection - Research and scholarship \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/research-and-scholarship/)

<sup>6</sup> [GLAM \(cultural heritage\) - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GLAM_(cultural_heritage))

- Independent Research Organisations (IROs),<sup>7</sup>
- cultural organisations.

Project types and their timelines were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic:<sup>8</sup>

‘In the initial design of Towards a National Collection, the Foundation Projects also had a major role in feeding into the subsequent Discovery Projects. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this initial timeline changed, impacting the through-line between each phase of the programme.’

## 2.4 Programme-level initiatives

The TaNC programme has several regular communications avenues:

- Website: [Towards a National Collection](#)
- Twitter: [Towards a National Collection \(@nat\\_collection\) / Twitter](#)
- Mailing list

A blog feature was created for the website but has not been populated to date.<sup>9</sup> In practice the News section was kept up to date.<sup>10</sup>

The Programme Directorate ensure:

- All TaNC outputs are published on [Zenodo](#), an open dissemination research data repository which preserves and makes available research and educational and informational content.
- Recordings of events are hosted on [YouTube](#).

Furthermore, the Programme Directorate have arranged:

- International webinars on digital public engagement strategies,<sup>11</sup> copyright and open access for digital collections,<sup>12</sup> and on international initiatives Digital NZ, Japan Search, CulturalItalia and Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek.<sup>13</sup>
- Project webinars
- Conference: *Unlocking the Potential of Digital Collections*, London, 26 April 2023.

<sup>7</sup> For a full list of IROs see: [Eligible independent research organisations and catapult centres – UKRI](#)

<sup>8</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023). Consolidation Report: Insights from Towards a National Collection Foundation Projects, p.5. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7674816>

<sup>9</sup> [Blog | Towards a National Collection](#)

<sup>10</sup> [PROJECT NEWS | Towards a National Collection](#)

<sup>11</sup> [TaNC Webinar: Digital Public Engagement Strategies - YouTube](#)

<sup>12</sup> [TaNC Webinar: Copyright and Open Access for Digital Collections: a Roundtable Discussion - YouTube](#)

<sup>13</sup> [TaNC Webinar: CulturalItalia & Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek Webinar - YouTube](#)

## 2.5 External Influences

A number of external influences were highlighted to be acknowledged and expected to be explored within the evaluation. These included:

- Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – including for the wider economy and the financial situation and staffing resource of HEIs, IROs and the wider cultural heritage sector.
- EU Exit – including repercussions for funding availability for UK HEIs and changes to freedom of movement and goods affecting IROs and other cultural heritage organisations.
- Given TaNC relates to digital records, it is subject to more specific influences such as copyright and licencing, which present barriers to linking data.

Lastly, as a programme, TaNC may be influenced by the expectations of its funder UKRI, AHRC and TaNC’s Steering Committee. UKRI are looking to assess the knowledge, economic and societal impacts of SPF and its programmes, including:<sup>14</sup>

- New and improved public policy (regulations, frameworks, programmes, taxes, subsidies)
- New and improved public services (infrastructure, health, welfare, education)
- New and improved products and services

## 2.6 Timeline

Figure 2.1 shows the timeline for the overall programme, the project types and the programme evaluation commission.

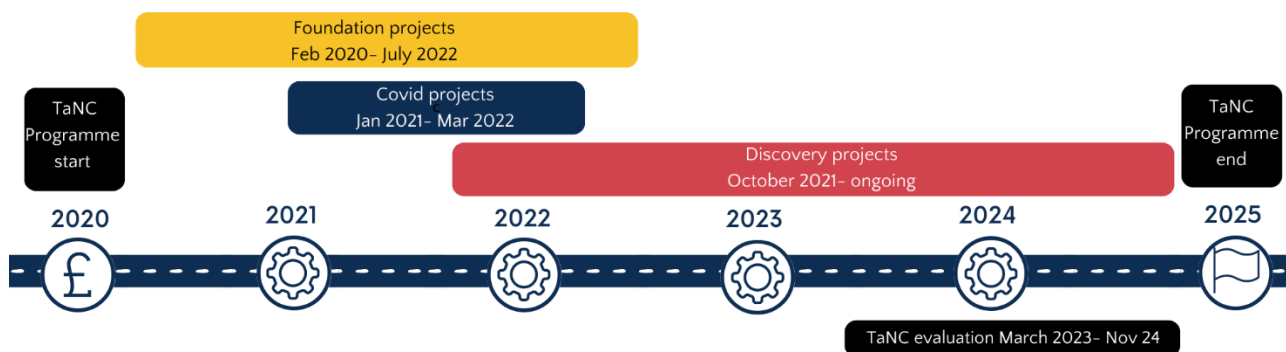


Figure 2.1: Timeline

<sup>14</sup> [Strategic Priorities Fund: baseline and interim process evaluation – UKRI](#)

## 3. Methodology

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### 3.1 Evaluation approach

Based on the evaluation brief and successful proposal, an evaluation approach and framework were designed by Diffley Partnership.

Diffley Partnership examined the public information on the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF), through which TaNC was funded (see section 2.1 for more information).<sup>15</sup> The Baseline and Interim Process Evaluation Technical Report (V3), published September 2021, included recommendations for Programme-level evaluation.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2 Theory of Change Model

A theory of change (ToC) is a description of why a particular way of working will be effective, showing how change happens in the short, medium and long term to achieve the intended impact. In some cases, ToC models are developed at the start of a programme to aid with strategic planning, in other cases they are developed for existing programmes to aid with evaluation.

The ToC model developed to aid the evaluation of TaNC is represented in a visual diagram (see Appendix A). This was discussed between the TaNC Programme Directorate and Diffley Partnership.

As this ToC model was for an existing programme, it plotted existing features of TaNC.

The assumptions behind the ToC model include:

- Overall project rationale was established at the start and funded through SPF accordingly (see section 2.1)
- There are links between the success of TaNC's projects and the success of the overall TaNC programme
- TaNC projects were hugely diverse and did not necessarily speak to all of TaNC's programme objectives

### 3.3 Secondary analysis

The research team were very conscious of not duplicating efforts and minimising the burden of taking part in this evaluation for research participants. As such desk research was incorporated as an important part of the evaluation.

Sources included:

- 7 Commissioned Reports,

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<sup>15</sup> [Strategic Priorities Fund – UKRI](#)

<sup>16</sup> [3484 SPF Evaluation DFR Technical Report V3 220623 \(ukri.org\)](#)

- 8 Foundation Projects Interim Reports,
- 8 Foundation Projects Final Reports,
- 3 COVID-19 Projects Final Reports,
- 5 Discovery Projects First Reports,
- 5 Discovery Projects Second Reports.

See Appendix B for full references and links to all published reports.

At the time of this interim programme evaluation report, Discovery Projects are ongoing. Therefore, more desk materials will be available towards the Phase 2 evaluation and report.

The evaluators also received data of responses to three questions asked to delegates at the TaNC conference: *Unlocking the Potential of Digital Collections*, April 2023. Results were collected using the platform Slido during the conference by TaNC's Programme Directorate.<sup>17</sup> Questions received responses from 92, 72 and 94 delegates respectively.

### 3.4 Engagement sessions

Engagement sessions were designed to hear from those involved in completed TaNC projects. At the time of this interim evaluation these consisted of Foundation and COVID-19 Projects, but not Discovery Projects. More engagement sessions will be conducted prior to the final evaluation report.

Participants were invited through the TaNC Programme Directorate, making clear that the research was being conducted by independent researchers. Diffley Partnership followed up on arrangements and ensured information was provided to potential participants; a Privacy Notice was shared in advance; and informed consent was ensured. It was made clear that TaNC Programme Directorate were not attending any sessions.

Seven engagement sessions were scheduled based on the preferences of those interested in taking part. However, two scheduled sessions did not proceed as there were no attendees.

Five engagement sessions took place online between 24 May and 8 June 2023. Two of the sessions were for those involved in COVID-19 Projects (24 May and 8 June) and three for those involved in Foundation Projects (25 May, 26 May, 6 June).

Sixteen individuals took part in engagement sessions:

- 5 individuals involved in COVID-19 Projects,
- 11 individuals involved in Foundation Projects.

The groups included:

- 4 individuals working within HEIs,
- 12 individuals working within the cultural heritage sector,
- Individuals employed by 13 different organisations.

Discussion Guides were prepared in advance (see Appendix C) and discussion topics followed the order of:

- Background and introduction,

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.slido.com/>



- TaNC objectives,
- Project reflections relevant for the programme evaluation,
- Collaboration,
- Future Focus.

Quotes from the engagement sessions are not attributed to individuals, instead they are labelled with [COVID-19 participant] or [Foundation participant].

### 3.5 Sector survey

An online survey of the UK's wider Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector was live from 22 June to 19 July, including employees, students and volunteers. At this time, academics were not engaged in this research, as they will be the subject of future consultations.

A snowball promotion technique was taken to reach the cultural heritage sector. This involved utilisation of TaNC methods of communications (see section 2.4 for links to these) and an email requesting that organisations across the cultural heritage sector promote the opportunity to take part in the survey through their communications avenues.

It was made clear that this research was being conducted by Diffley Partnership. A bespoke privacy notice was created for the survey. The survey (see Appendix F) began by introducing the purpose of the survey, towards the TaNC evaluation, and then asked questions within the following sections in order:

- About your role and organisation,
- Familiarity with TaNC,
- Experience of TaNC,
- UK cultural heritage sector and digital collections developments.

Overall, this yielded 193 responses, with wide coverage across all relevant sectors. Of those surveyed, 129 (70%) belonged to organisations based in England, with 31 (17%) and 20 (11%) from Scotland and Wales, respectively (Appendix E). Additionally, 158 (86%) responses came from paid employees, with 10 (5%) from volunteers and 4 (2%) from student/trainees (Appendix E).

Those surveyed generally possessed some familiarity with the TaNC programme, with 132 (74%) respondents having heard of TaNC prior to completing the survey (Appendix E). Of these, 98 (75%) were not directly involved in TaNC, neither at the project nor programme level, while 32 (17%) cited direct involvement with the TaNC programme and/or a TaNC project (Appendix E).

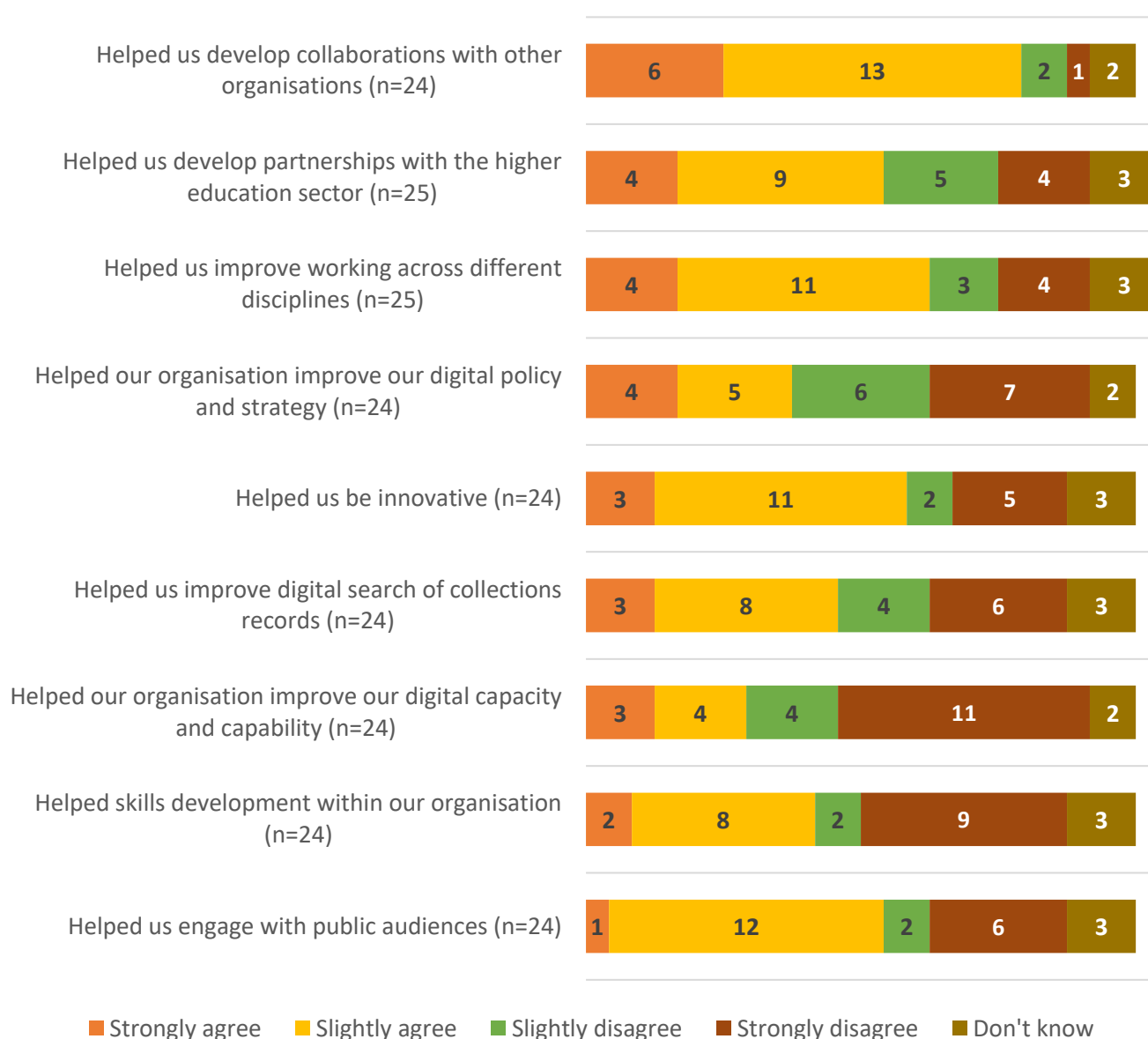
This survey will be repeated approximately a year later, and the final evaluation would include results from the second survey and commentary on any differences and similarities between data from the two time points.

## 4. Interim Findings – Impacts for Cultural Heritage Organisations

### 4.1 Introduction

This findings chapter includes interim results on TaNC’s progress towards organisational-level impacts for cultural heritage organisations.

Survey respondents with involvement in TaNC (32) were asked on an agreement scale about TaNC’s impacts on their organisation in the first cultural heritage survey. Results are shown in figure 4.1 for those who rated each statement within this question.



**Figure 4.1: Do you agree or disagree that TaNC has resulted in the following?**

Survey respondents from organisations involved in TaNC were most positive about these results from TaNC (see figure 4.1):

- Helped us develop collaborations with other organisations – 19 in agreement; 3 in disagreement.
- Helped us improve working across different disciplines – 15 in agreement; 7 in disagreement.
- Helped us to be innovative – 14 in agreement; 7 in disagreement.
- Helped us engage with public audiences – 13 in agreement; 8 in disagreement.
- Helped us develop partnerships with the higher education sector – 13 in agreement; 9 in disagreement.

They had mixed views on the following results from TaNC:

- Helped us improve digital search of collections records – 11 in agreement; 10 in disagreement.
- Helped skills development in our organisation – 10 in agreement; 11 in disagreement.

Respondents were most negative towards TaNC in these areas:

- Helped our organisation improve our digital policy and strategy – 9 in agreement; 13 in disagreement.
- Helped our organisation improve our digital capacity and capability – 7 in agreement; 15 in disagreement.

Results give an indication of impacts for cultural heritage organisations involved at the time of the survey (22 June to end of 19 July 2023). Interpretations of results are mindful that impacts can take time to materialise. Furthermore only 25 people involved in TaNC and working for cultural heritage organisations responded to this question, a sub-set of the wider sample of 193. The sections below bring in further evidence from the engagement sessions and desk research towards those areas with the most negative results from the survey.

## 4.2 Policy and strategy

As already mentioned, survey results indicated that impact on policy and strategy may be an area for improvement. For the statement, ‘helped our organisation improve our digital policy and strategy’, nine were in agreement; 13 in disagreement.

Participants in the engagement sessions from within and without the cultural heritage sector gave some examples of how their TaNC project(s) informed their organisations’ policy and strategy. One example was particularly strong and demonstrated how TaNC helped them adapt during the pandemic:

*‘We have been building a database in [organisation]- we have been building search our collections. We even have a KPI where we report on the number of extra records added. And then Covid came, we had done so much work on segmentation of people that walked [in], but we had never thought to do similar work with those engaging with our database online. And that was the only way to access our collections during the pandemic. So we thought we really need to figure out how our existing platform was performing. And the TaNC Covid projects came up and this was an amazing opportunity to do something...that’s made us re-think our approach to open access. So to enable access to our collection we have to share them on other platforms and think about third party platforms, licencing, and think about our online audiences. We are now acting on these questions. So the project has led to learning*

*that is feeding into quite a transformational strategy... Institutionally for us it was big. Made a real difference'. [COVID-19 participant]*

Others felt that they had already been working in this space, and appreciated the chance to further this work, even if it did not substantially alter their strategy:

*'[we have] been working in this space...since the 1990s and since the web was shiny and new. And we have been working on this particular challenge for ages...The COVID project we got involved [in] very opportunistically...so we thought this is an opportunity to work with interesting partners and demonstrated a concept we were developing anyway.'* [COVID-19 participant]

All were keen for insights from TaNC at a programme-level to inform policy and strategy at a national-level:

*'Maybe what you're hearing here actually is there's an appetite on the GLAM side to actually start to have a more detailed conversation about ideating what a national collection is...and what the big questions are that need answering. And some of that stuff is already kind of emergent, it doesn't necessarily need to wait for the discovery projects to report.'* [Foundation participant]

The final report for one of the Foundation Projects, Provisional Semantics, was very critical of project working leading to strategic change:<sup>18</sup>

*'As project work is not a sustainable way of bringing about change, embed ongoing and continuous critical reflection, as well as ethical collaboration with stakeholder communities and individuals and move towards a relinquishing of power by institutions and the individuals representing them, and the active contestation of institutional orthodoxies.'*

### 4.3 Digital capacity, capability and skills

As already mentioned, survey results indicated that impact on digital capacity and capability is an area for improvement. For the statement, 'helped our organisation improve our digital capacity and capability', seven respondents were in agreement and 15 were in disagreement. Furthermore, for 'helped skills development in our organisation', ten respondents were in agreement; but 11 were in disagreement. The engagement sessions expanded on these findings.

One engagement session participant explained their project focused on digital capability amongst small organisations, and as such:

*'In our project there are people in eight museums that have skills that they didn't have before'* [COVID-19 participant]

Other participants explained that being part of the project team had benefitted them directly:

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<sup>18</sup> Pringle, Emily, Mavin, Helen, Greenhalgh, Tate, Dalal-Clayton, Anjalie, Rutherford, Ananda, Bramwell, Jane, Blackford, Katie, & Balukiewicz, Kim. (2022). Provisional Semantics: Addressing the challenges of representing multiple perspectives within an evolving digitised national collection (Version 2), p.42. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7081347>

*'I was quite motivated to participate in the program. I thought the vision was great - at least at that stage of what we knew of it, which was very early...it was a set of research that we were already looking at in our department and wanted to further and so there was a research question that we thought was valuable to the public and to specialized researchers. And it also of course gave me an opportunity to lead a project potentially and to advance my own development, my career, and to branch into some new areas of research that were very much different to what I do in my day to day.'*  
[Foundation participant]

However, it was also noted that the wider impact of this skills development would depend on any future use of projects' findings:

*'For those involved in the projects we have all developed skills, but in terms of broader sector wide skills that depends on what happens after TaNC.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Indeed, a sector survey response from an individual involved in a TaNC project shares their frustration that leading organisations benefitted most: 'there needs to be more support to develop infrastructure and skills within collaborating organisations as a whole not just the project leads.'

Participants raised how TaNC was harnessing, rather than creating, digital capacity and capability:

*'Transforming digital research capacity sounds like quite a large scale...and you know it's a big ambition and I think there's opportunities there. But I wouldn't say TaNC is the thing that is kind of really doing that transformation. I think it a lot of the work feels like a reaction to it and an attempt to bring it into the organizations we're working in rather than being the transformation itself.'*  
[Foundation participant]

Again, there was appetite for TaNC to help capacity and capability, but also awareness of the larger context of digital skills within the cultural heritage sector:

*'What I would say about that is ... if you're talking about skills, well, whose skills? And actually, if any of these things are going to come to fruition, it will be needing to be the skills of database managers, collections managers, curators....If anything actually wants to happen from any of this, there will need to be another whole load of funding put into skilling people up to, for example, use AI or use whatever technology, because to my mind otherwise it's just come to "oh, here's an interesting little thing that we did" and that's the end of it.'* [Foundation participant]

One participant described the scramble to secure a limited number of people to form projects:

*'the other thing is not so much TaNC offering opportunities as suddenly eight projects all needed people with the same skills working in skills which we have a national scarcity of, working in similar areas, and the same has happened with Discovery projects as well. Many of the faces around the tables when you go to meetings, all people that we know and people who are brilliant and we'd have loved them to apply to our project... So it's a very small pool that we were fishing in, brilliant as the people in it are.'* [Foundation participant]

The view that digital skills are limited was echoed in the Foundation Projects Consolidation report which described this skills gap as a sector-wide problem:<sup>19</sup>

*‘Most Foundation Projects have highlighted the issue with the wide gap in digital skills of the staff and partners involved, the challenge that this gap poses in building and delivering a digital project. This gap is representative of the sector, and should be addressed with appropriate training.’*

One participant explained that digital capacity and capability in the cultural heritage sector is subject to the wider technological development of user-friendly software solutions for non-specialists:

*‘In our sector there is a lot of money going into digital skills. We are teaching people to use hand tools and to hand craft digital content, using very manually intensive techniques instead of investing in some power tools and giving people the power tools and cracking on with it. So for example, before Youtube, putting up a video online would be difficult, and then you don’t really need to know how it’s done, you can just do it. And the problem is at the moment the things we want to do are really hard as we don’t have the power tools developed, and people are learning skills that they shouldn’t have to think about.’*  
[COVID-19 participant]

## 4.4 Ambitions for growth and development of digital collections

Many engagement participants and responses to the sector survey mentioned the ongoing work to digitise cultural heritage collections. Interestingly, this was largely framed as an endeavour which could be completed, but was subject to funding and resource. Frustrations were expressed by members of the sector, and a feeling that small organisations especially are facing particular barriers.

Within the engagement sessions, it was explained that digital records take many formats and consist of many different types of information. It was also noted that as more knowledge from different perspectives is collected about material culture, and digital-born data, there is scope for vast and complex databases.

Interestingly, one participant from a higher education institution shared that the datasets did not meet their expectations, and available ‘test data’ was limited.<sup>20</sup>

*‘A big barrier is most of the records are not online at the moment. So TaNC was predicated on there being lots of online resources which could be brought together. But [that is] simply not the case for most museums. It can only work with what was online...I get the sense from talking to people in the projects that the problems with bringing together the data are just the same. ...So I don’t think anything has really changed.’* [COVID-19 participant]

Moving to improvement of digital search of collections records, opinion was divided in the sector survey, with 11 respondents agreeing that TaNC helped to improve this and ten disagreeing. Through the engagement sessions it became apparent that development of digital collections had been enabled through the TaNC Foundation and COVID-19 Projects, to an extent. Moreover, there were ambitions for further

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<sup>19</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023), p.16.

<sup>20</sup> [test data - ISTQB Glossary](#)

growth and development. Many of these ambitions pre-date TaNC programme involvement, and indeed acted as motivations to be involved in TaNC.

All the same, engagement session participants were looking forward to the outcomes of Discovery Projects in this regard:

*'There are projects funded now that are looking to that, so I'm thinking about the underwater one [Unpath'd Waters: Marine and Maritime]. So really it's what is next.'* [COVID-19 participant]

*'The Heritage Connector project is genuinely exciting and innovative. It came up with some good stuff and showed the way. Still unclear if Congruence Engine is following through on that. But the stuff of Heritage Connector was genuinely interesting.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Fundamental questions remain on what shared ambitions should consist of, and where resource is best allocated:

*'It feels like what you really need there is not just the research projects to find the interesting ways of doing that, it's the sort of bigger and longer term expenses, building the digital infrastructure and maintaining it and keeping that going. I think that's what's needed to transform digital search. ... you might get more bang for the buck by spending money on digitisation.'* [Foundation participant]

Legacy is also a consideration raised by project participants, for example:

*'Opportunities for people to come up with new ideas and think, think creatively in terms of digital possibilities... there wasn't a lot of money across the board...there was no sense that it was going to be marketed beyond this or taken up. So where it could have gone, it's probably a different story from what actually did happen.'* [Foundation participant]

Views on digital developments pertaining to dissolving barriers between collections are discussed further in section 5.2.

## 4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion these sections contain examples of TaNC making a difference to cultural heritage organisations involved through TaNC projects.

Survey respondents involved in TaNC projects were most positive that TaNC:

- Helped us develop collaborations with other organisations.
- Helped us improve working across different disciplines.
- Helped us to be innovative.
- Helped us engage with public audiences.
- Helped us develop partnerships with the higher education sector.

Views were more mixed that TaNC:

- Helped us improve digital search of collections records.
- Helped skills development in our organisation.

And were more negative in their view that TaNC:

- Helped our organisation improve our digital policy and strategy.
- Helped our organisation improve our digital capacity and capability.

For the aspects where TaNC's impact may be more limited, this is explained by a number of factors including:

- the context of each organisation,
- the nature of funding projects with set timescales and resource,
- a limited pool of people with the necessary skills for digital development,
- a digital skills gap, further aggravated by a lack of appropriate digital tools for non-specialists.

For digital policy and strategy, other evaluation sources showed that this was highly dependent on organisational contexts. However, there was an expectation that TaNC would advance policy and strategy discussions at a UK level, with benefits to organisations.

Evidence was found that TaNC is developing skills within project teams. However, there are wider challenges with digital capacity and capability within the cultural heritage sector. The evaluation revealed that there is a limited pool of specialists for TaNC to harness and utilise in projects.

In terms of growth and development of digital collections this was found to be a motivation for getting involved in TaNC and a desire fuelled further by involvement in TaNC. Participants expected more benefits to come through the Discovery Projects and the legacy of TaNC.

Chapter five includes interim findings towards impacts for collections and their audiences. Therefore, chapter five expands on some of the areas the sector survey respondents were more positive about, including working across disciplines and engaging with public audiences.



## 5. Interim Findings – Impacts for Collections and their Audiences

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### 5.1 Introduction

This findings chapter includes interim results on TaNC's progress towards four objectives all relating to collections and their audiences:

- Begin to dissolve barriers between different collections
- Extend researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location
- Benefit a diverse range of audiences
- Open up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research.

### 5.2 Begin to dissolve barriers between different collections

In the sector survey, respondents were mixed on the progress TaNC has made to achieve this objective. While 33% agreed that TaNC is beginning to dissolve barriers between collections, 20% disagreed and a large majority (43%) expressed that they 'don't know' how TaNC is doing on this objective (See figure 7.2).

These mixed opinions may result from the nature of the TaNC programme, as meeting this objective depends heavily on the achievements of individual projects to bring together different collections records.

Participants involved in Foundations Projects explained in general terms how their projects had made advancements:

*'I think the intention for our project was very much around that dissolving barriers between collections. So it was about kind of how we can use kind of enhanced image searching to connect collections up. And so I think it did do some of that kind of dissolving barriers between collections.'* [Foundation participant]

*'We definitely saw that as the kind of the fundamental tool to do that exact thing. So to actually link information about collections and their items beyond the kind of the systems or the software or the platforms that we actually hold that information in. So that was our kind of the key to our proposal was on that specific bullet point about essentially creating links between things as a way to dissolve those barriers.'* [Foundation participant]

*'The technology itself [IIIF] is pretty much core to dissolving barriers.'* [Foundation participant]

*'One of the things we created was a single search portal where you could search nine different collections across the world and just be given high resolution images based on a keyword. So I looked and there were many institutions that provided access to IIIF information and images. But you have to spend some time reading their documentation and be fairly technically au fait to actually get anything out. [But for different audiences] if you don't know what's in the collection, what the scope of the*

*collection is, how do you know how to start searching for something? ...It was looking at the ideas, how you sort of throw things at people based on their own understanding and that can act as a way in. And I think that that was quite effective and it worked quite well and we had really good feedback on that.’ [Foundation participant]*

The first report for the Discovery Project, Unpath'd Waters, includes this statement:<sup>21</sup>

*‘In creating the framework, we have already made advances in the international ‘vocabularies’ used to define heritage assets (wrecks, archaeological sites etc), and periods of time. This is vital because without common reference points it is impossible to link collections properly.’*

The engagement sessions provided some useful context for the TaNC Programme Directorate and Steering Committee to be aware of at this interim stage.

Firstly, the premise of dissolving barriers was questioned:

*“Begin to dissolve barriers between collections” sounds great and, on the surface of it, something like we can all get behind. But then the question is, well, why? I don't think that was quite defined. What's the problem with barriers between collections? Because...to say “dissolve barriers” sounds like something we all want to do. But actually collections have each evolved for different reasons and are used by different people. And the minute you try to merge them into one meta collection, you come up with all the problems that [project] came up with. Which is well then how are you going to navigate it, search for things, find things in a meaningful way? Which wasn't really quite defined and isn't defined by the phrase “begin to dissolve barriers”. Because I think there was a kind of...a sort of lack of definition of why we're bothering or why that would be a good aspiration’ [Foundation participant]*

*‘I have no objection to the de-centralised way the UK operates on this,’ [COVID-19 participant]*

*‘Simply defining one single ontology that everything needs to be mapped to is not the way. I’ve been involved in that thing before and it’s quite inflexible.’ [COVID-19 participant]*

There was evidence that those involved in the TaNC COVID-19 and Foundation Projects had their reservations on dissolving barriers confirmed:

*‘Even when people appear to be doing the same kind of thing very often, they're doing a very slightly different thing, and that actually there might be good reasons for that. So trying to sort of blur all of those or dissolve all of those barriers is not easy because people are doing what they're doing. Like, for example, cataloguing their collections in different ways for historic reasons. So then you try to bring them together. And so that's one thing. And then bringing together people who know about design collections, say, for example, with computing scientists, they seem to be talking the same language,*

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<sup>21</sup> Sloane, Barney, Richards, Julian, Sturt, Fraser, Coats, Ann, Roberts, Michael, Gaffney, Vince, Jeffrey, Stuart, & Perry, Sara. (2022). First Report - Unpath'd Waters: Marine and Maritime Collections in the UK, p.2. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7152083>

*but actually they're possibly not. That seemed to be like another barrier to things connecting.'*  
[Foundation participant]

Observations were reflective, and engagement respondents considered relative progress in the UK, and across time periods:

*'In a narrow sense I think that we did [begin to dissolve barriers]... I think we developed some tools and some technologies that started scratching away at questions of how you could...I think we would all kind of concede it was very much a beginning. And you know, doing that at scale...lots of different things, remains really a challenging thing...I am not sure, if I'm brutally honest, if you ask about where we are in 2023 versus where we were in 2020...is the landscape of British collections more integrated and have some of those barriers been dissolved between them? I find that a bit more questionable, but I might be wrong.'* [Foundation participant]

*'Depends on whether it's at a UK or an international level. A lot of things were advancing the UK, and we don't have the centralised data bases other countries have.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Many participants emphasised the beginning aspect of this objective, discussing that they believe TaNC has begun to make headway on this, but there was no guarantee projects would develop solutions:

*'Although we weren't necessarily able to kind of technically absorb the collections, one thing that was interesting was getting to understand more about different collections and also locations...understanding some of the difficulties that different groups, museums, galleries, have with being able to either make their collections accessible or just for the curators to understand the different ways of understanding it. But I think that was useful. I mean that ...dissolves some barriers ... a national consciousness about it,'* [Foundation participant]

It was also noted that, given another opportunity, they may approach the challenge of dissolving barriers through a different tack:

*'As a citizen of this country or someone interested in in the collections of this country, I want a seamless way of accessing them. And I took it to be that point of view...the thing that we are doing, all of us [TaNC projects], in different ways, is building an enormous amount of infrastructure to enable some kind of cross search or cross access. So "dissolve" is highly metaphorical and not necessarily perhaps the best verb I would say...with all the time in the world we might have designed a different project that would have tackled that more head on'* [Foundation participant]

At a project level, there were confident assertions of progress in project reports, including:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Winters, Jane, Stack, John, Dutia, Kalyan, Unwin, Jamie, Lewis, Rhiannon, Palmer, Richard, & Wolff, Angela. (2022). Heritage Connector: A Towards a National Collection Foundation Project Final Report, p.1. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6022678>

*‘Overall, the Heritage Connector project demonstrated that the methods used can be used to build links at scale between and within collections.’*

### 5.3 Extend researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location

In the sector survey, for those respondents involved in TaNC, 13 agreed that TaNC helped them to engage with public audiences and eight disagreed. Engagement session participants described progress towards this objective. Some explained this was a key motivation for their specific projects, and were reasonably confident they had met expectations:

*‘Yeah, the kind of the tools where all collectively have tried to put out there have been making it easier for you to be able to do research on the collections that we have. That was just my general thought really.’ [Foundation participant]*

However, their comments were often qualified with the use of terms such as ‘some’ within their narrative. For example:

*‘It struck me as reasonably clear that there were some resources that were now more accessible. There was a new portal that you could cross search...about stuff – [but] does making it available through an aggregator extend access if it was already accessible previously? I think it's probably still like kind of an open question – but some of those projects...it seems to me have done some fairly concrete things, others maybe less so...I'm not sure that that our project [did this].’ [Foundation participant]*

*‘I mean, we came up with a prototype ...to enable access, but there wasn't very much money really when things went down to it. So we were forced to do what we could. But it [the Foundation Projects were] more about the foundations of the project and being able to kind of look at what things would work and what wouldn't.’ [Foundation participant]*

*‘So that was one of the things we wanted to do [awareness and access to collections] and I think that that did succeed. Could it have succeeded more? Quite possibly. But I think we managed to hit a number of people and our metrics for engagement were actually a lot higher than we originally intended because we did everything virtually. So we could include a lot more people. So yeah, I think to some extent.’ [Foundation participant]*

Discussions came back to the underlying topic of knowledge of potential users of data collections and information on what is available:

*‘I think there were kind of layers to the infrastructure and I think they're quite different in terms of how they might be improved, so in a sense the top layer might be: how does anyone even know what's in these collections and where they should go? How do you even find out about us? And it's something we're talking about internally.’ [Foundation participant]*

Desire for resource to digitise was raised:

*‘[TaNC] didn't come with any - still [does] not come, as far as I'm aware, in the next stages - with funding to make more collections available digitally. I think there's an argument that could be made*

*[that] would get more bang for your buck by just using the existing research pot to digitize stuff and then give people access to it to play with it and so on. But that's just me being bitter and twisted because trying to get money to do digitisation is really challenging. The other thing that's really challenging to get funding for is cataloguing, which I think actually is research, but again, without the digital stuff and good catalogue records and metadata for it, you're not gonna be able to extend access beyond physical boundaries because you're still gonna need to come to [venue] to actually look at the stuff that we have, if you happen to be able to find it.'* [Foundation participant]

Participants felt that this objective may be better met by Discovery Projects:

*'My immediate reaction is probably this objective was...the discovery grants were much more aimed at this than the foundation grants because the foundation grants were by and large much more about trying technologies out.'* [Foundation participant]

Looking to the reporting to date on Discovery Projects, descriptions of Transforming Collections support this point:

*'So far, Transforming Collections has...delivered an international conference to engage general and specialist audiences in the Netherlands, building on an existing partnership with Van Abbemuseum and developing research networks, including with The Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam and the Research Center for Material Culture at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam.'*<sup>23</sup>

*'A Cross Project Workshop proposal addressing data ethics is in development. The proposed workshop will focus on introducing the project's data ethics principles and exploring how these can be applied in practice, addressing, for example, positionality, algorithmic bias and injustice, transparency and extraction. Exploratory conversations have taken place with all five Discovery Projects and the workshop is due to take place in autumn 2023.'*<sup>24</sup>

## 5.4 Benefit a diverse range of audiences

At the interim evaluation stage it is difficult to assess the achievement of this outcome – firstly, because the benefits to audiences were often indirect, and also because these would not come immediately from the project deliverables (that is, digital solutions).

Results from the survey demonstrate the difficulty for respondents to gauge TaNC's impact on audiences at this stage, with over half (51%) of respondents saying they 'don't know' how well TaNC is doing this, with the rest split between agreement (22%) and disagreement (26%) that TaNC is achieving this (See Figure 7.2).

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<sup>23</sup> pui san lok, susan, Grierson, Mick, Fiebrink, Rebecca, Dalal-Clayton, Anjalie, Velios, Athanasios, Griffin, Christopher, Barton, Hannah, Gillick, Jon, Rutherford, Ananda, Webb, Charlotte, Bower-Morris, Kit, Rebernak, Jerneja, & Kaminska, Fleur. (2023). Second Report - Transforming Collections: Reimagining Art, Nation and Heritage, p.6-7. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7967237>

<sup>24</sup> pui san lok, susan, Grierson, Mick, Fiebrink, Rebecca, Dalal-Clayton, Anjalie, Velios, Athanasios, Griffin, Christopher, Barton, Hannah, Gillick, Jon, Rutherford, Ananda, Webb, Charlotte, Bower-Morris, Kit, Rebernak, Jerneja, & Kaminska, Fleur. (2023), p.29

Through the engagement sessions it emerged that benefitting audiences was a motivation for TaNC and a key feature of how TaNC was framed in order to achieve SPF funding:

*'Part of the problem was how expectations were built up. The original press release has the usual hyperbole around this, so they have set themselves up to fail on this one.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Engagement sessions revealed a range of skill levels were needed to conduct public research within projects. One participant explained their project team did not feel confident in meeting the requirements for handling special category data.<sup>25</sup> They indicated that personal data was being collected, but was not necessarily valuable to understand project reach, and that this was a barrier to identifying if they had benefitted a diverse range of audiences:

*'...did a survey that we sent out to everyone who signed up to volunteer on any of our projects and the team did quite a bit of work digging into sort of what their motivations were...but it was a relatively small sample size and within the project, it was one very small element of a project that was quite thinly stretched and we didn't feel that we had the expertise within the team or the capacity within the team to get to grips with it properly. So we ended up not asking questions around any protected characteristics...we would have needed it as a separate work package.'* [Foundation participant]

In contrast, one project had an interest in best practice in social research, which supported the project in benefitting a more diverse range of audiences:

*'We had audience research methodology that had [a] statistically significant sample of the UK. We had age, gender, also region for a quantitative survey and then we also had focus groups that were...the focus group composition was based on those characteristics as well, but then also level of interest in heritage, as well as level of technological skill, level of technological competence? And so that gave us a strong evidence base which we can then use to help design our maps essentially and understand people and not only that, but try and inform the second phase, you know the report etcetera. But alongside that is...we really try to look at this term inclusion and look at the geographical basis of inclusion and use the geography of cultural heritage as a way to access new or diverse audiences.'* [Foundation participant]

Another participant was especially critical of the benefit of TaNC to a range of audiences. They suggested more framing of expectations would have benefitted projects:

*'There wasn't due diligence in what type of public engagement TaNC was trying to achieve. So we did what we felt was right. But there's no mechanism to say whether this was happening...What are the goals in the public engagement and how do we know we are reaching those – individually or collectively – that would be useful. I'm assuming public engagement is the whole purpose of TaNC. So if everything should be stemming from this goal, then it should be clearer in its definition. And that's the starting point. And I don't see that as a coherent strategy within TaNC. A robust reason for the public engagement – why? What are we trying to transform in society by doing this? I know with the urgency grants everyone was just scrambling and doing their best. But I would have thought this would*

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<sup>25</sup> [Special category data | ICO](#)

*have been more thought-through at the programme funding application stage, before the projects.'*  
[COVID-19 participant]

Again, there was an appetite for more knowledge-sharing from TaNC on how digital collections developments can best benefit diverse audiences:

*'In terms of TaNC it just comes down to the legacy. That focused piece of work around how audiences engage with online collections, it doesn't feel that there is a targeted outcome forming from TaNC yet.'*  
[COVID-19 participant]

## 5.5 Open up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research

In the wider GLAM sector survey, many agreed that TaNC is opening up collection to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research: 34% agreed and only 16% disagreed (see Figure 7.2).

In terms of promoting interdisciplinary working, engagement session participants explained that this was encouraged by the very set up of the TaNC projects. Requiring different partners, requiring different specialisms, and encouraging collaboration were seen as strengths of TaNC.

The COVID-19 pandemic was seen to affect collaboration in a number of ways including:

- Organisations transitioning to working completely online
- Organisations re-prioritising work
- Furlough affecting staff, including some involved heavily in TaNC projects

As pointed out in the interim report for the Foundation Project, Deep Discoveries:<sup>26</sup>

*'All three IROs – TNA, V&A, and RBGE – have seen a significant shift in demand to digital services-related staff as noted by others across the sector. From a sudden surge in digitally available material to new ways of interacting with audiences entirely online (e.g. virtual exhibitions and events), our UX research team has been stretched in unforeseeable ways.'*

But overall, engagement session participants mentioned the benefits of connecting online with partners based in other organisations and other locations. For example,

*'The benefit that has come through the twelve months project was, even working at a large, well-funded national institution, I had not had the chance to work with data scientists before. The one benefit I found with this model was the cross-disciplinary nature. And now I'm in those forums. It transformed this for me as coming out of ourselves in our sector and to work with others.'* [COVID-19 participant]

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<sup>26</sup> Angelova, Lora, Willcox, Pip, Collomosse, John, Norman, Joanna, and Cubey Robert (2020). Deep Discoveries: A Towards a National Collection Foundation Project Interim Report, p.5.  
<https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Deep%20Discoveries.pdf>

The report for the live Discovery Project, The Congruence Engine, included context and recommendations relating back to digital capability of staff:<sup>27</sup>

*‘Alongside any resource for technical infrastructure, resource for training and long-term skills development is needed. Currently there exists no career path for digital heritage specialists, and existing historical and curatorial practitioners are not equipped to undertake the more digital forms of practice that we can expect to become normal in the near future. There are important questions to be addressed relating to the siloeing of different kinds of expertise – digital, historical and curatorial – often reinforced by distinct language and working cultures. We recommend investment in career paths for individuals to gain hybrid skills to enable the linked national collection within the coming age of more digital curatorship and scholarship.’*

## 5.6 Conclusion

This findings chapter includes interim results on TaNC’s progress towards four objectives all relating to collections and their audiences. The sum of material examined for the interim evaluation confirms there is progress, and expectations for more progress through Discovery Projects.

Evidence showed that TaNC is incorporating many different approaches to dissolve barriers between collections. However, there are challenges with these attempts and questioning of the premise by those involved in TaNC projects.

The ambition for TaNC to result in extension of access beyond physical boundaries is supported, and examples were provided at an interim stage. Another motivation for becoming involved in TaNC is hope that time and investment through TaNC will benefit cultural heritage sector audiences. However, cultural heritage organisations raise their limitations with establishing the diversity of their online audiences and any change or improvement in this regard.

At the interim stage there is strong evidence of TaNC creating cross-disciplinary and cross collections research. This is seen as valuable for the cultural heritage sector and the approach to ensure valuable digital developments.

Chapter six moves on to consider TaNC’s impacts for digital collections research ecosystem.

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<sup>27</sup> Boon, Tim, Butterworth, Alex, Graham, Helen, Rees, Arran, Sichiani, Anna Maria, Webb-Bourne, Katerina, & Winters, Jane. (2023), p.7.



## 6. Interim Findings – Impacts for Digital Collections Research Ecosystem

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### 6.1 Introduction

This findings chapter includes interim results related to the broader ecosystem for digital collections research.

As such, findings are included on progress towards two of TaNC's objectives:

- Be active and of benefit across the UK,
- Provide clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward.

Moreover, these are intersected by examination of TaNC developing the following:

- Partnership between academic and cultural heritage sectors,
- A community with a shared vision.

### 6.2 Be active and of benefit across the UK

Of all the objectives surveyed, respondents were most likely to express that they 'don't know' if TaNC is achieving activity and benefit across the UK, with 54% selecting this option (see Figure 7.2). In contrast, 28% agreed that TaNC is achieving this objective, while 18% disagreed (see Figure 7.2).

One way to estimate TaNC's progress on this objective is to examine the many organisations involved in TaNC projects, provided in Appendix D.

Many engagement session participants questioned the use of the term 'national' in the programme title. This was for a number of reasons, including that it gave the impression that TaNC was for national cultural heritage organisations – those funded directly by the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

*'I heard about the notion of national collection then being for the national institutions. That was one sort of issue with the term 'national' that came up at the start. It's a massive scope issue internally and externally within the description – that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it is when you've got limited time and money.'* [Foundation participant]

The discourse was present that TaNC was designed to benefit IROs primarily, and not the wider cultural heritage sector.

*'Institutions have been distributed across. But it hasn't benefitted all layers of the heritage sector. Very much IROs and bigger organisations and almost no small organisations.'* [COVID-19 participant]

People involved in projects had won competitive funding and were very keen to make an impact at a UK-level:

*'It kind of demonstrated how difficult it was to do really...because really, if you were going to go make it really active and of benefit across the UK, you'd need a whole lot more money to actually implement it and operationalize it and overcome all the obstacles to it.'* [Foundation participant]

They reflected that, for some of the projects trying to develop solutions, these were tested on larger organisations, and TaNC would make real progress if some of the solutions developed could be transferred to smaller organisations:

*'There are certain things larger institutions are able to do...making your information about your own collection available, even if it's on your own website type thing, and it's not possible for many small or even medium sized institutions to do that well. So partly some of the discussions about towards the national collection is potentially providing the opportunities for others to join the party'* [Foundation participant]

### 6.3 Partnerships between academic and cultural heritage sectors

Engagement session participants shared a range of experiences, from entirely new partnerships being forged through TaNC, to existing partnerships being enhanced.

*'I think in our specific project because of the networks that numbers were already involved in – it's not that we just did our thing and that was it. We were quite active in kind of reaching out and collaborating with our wider networks. But that was because of the networks that we already had ...I was actively sort of saying we're doing this thing as part of this project, what do you guys think of this? How could we use these technologies in other contexts and so forth.'* [Foundation participant]

Participants were generally very positive.

*'Just working with new partners, or existing partners in new ways. I've nothing but positive things to say about that.'* [COVID-19 participant]

*'We had never worked with them before. The partnership was put together by an office in our university. And then we came together, and a lot of what they learned from our collaboration they've been able to apply that. Through doing the project itself but also knowing what data looks like in archaeology. And we are now on the advisory board of their project. And none of that would have happened without TaNC.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Those who had many organisations involved in their projects described how this brought many benefits, but also the challenge of people getting to know one another and collaborate quickly:

*'[timelines are] often compressed for research projects, but I think this felt particularly compressed and, for us, because we have so many partners and a lot of them were very new to doing these kinds of research projects, that made that very challenging.'* [Foundation participant]

Bringing together these parties was seen as especially important given many cultural heritage roles involve research in day-to-day work. One participant explained that they see this ambition at a funder level, above the programme level:

*'I suppose one of the nice things, and UKRI's approach in general, is the connection between the HEIs and the IROs, and partly that's because we don't have many museums with their own research teams in these disciplines. So in that way it brings together those two worlds' [COVID-19 participant]*

From the side of the academic sector, an additional point was raised within the commissioned report, Digital Collections Audit:<sup>28</sup>

*"I think academic researchers default to thinking that the significant collections are within national museums or large regional museums when actually there are significant collections in the tiniest of museums, tucked away. Some campaign or something needs to be done to chip away at that attitude. Anyway, I think the whole TaNC programme is almost perpetuating that, and there's potential for a missed opportunity to get the local significance of collections out there."*

At programme level, engagement session participants commended TaNC for bringing together academic and cultural heritage sectors, for example:

*'So the academic and cultural heritage divide is one that I don't know if the program has really managed to bridge effectively, in terms of recruitment, in terms of project organization, in terms of a lot of different things. But on the other hand, it has made great strides too. So you know it's not something that you're going to be able to do in a year, is it you know?' [Foundation participant]*

The commissioned Consolidation report for Foundation Projects was damning with regards to the support of IROs to continue or extend the partnerships developed between organisations:<sup>29</sup>

*'The majority of Independent Research Organisations involved in the Foundation Projects did not extend any financial or practical support post-project, including maintaining the partnerships established during externally funded initiatives'*

Engagement sessions for this evaluation provided examples of people involved in projects building on the relationships they forged, including applying for further funding (see section 6.5).

One response to the sector survey indicates there may be some tension between HEI and cultural sector partners: 'At the moment our data is used to support transient academic projects but we don't see the benefit of / or implement the research within the office.'

It is crucial to acknowledge that the unplanned backdrop to these projects was the COVID-19 pandemic. Organisations were adapting during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, as explained in project reports:

*'As across the cultural and heritage sector and society more widely, COVID-19 impacted the case study organisations and the members of the Provisional Semantics research team profoundly. Consequently, the project's processes, timescales and stakeholder interactions had to adapt to continuously changing circumstances. Despite, and perhaps because of this, the research has surfaced important findings and*

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<sup>28</sup> Gosling, Kevin, McKenna, Gordon, & Cooper, Adrian. (2022). Digital Collections Audit, p.4. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6379581>

<sup>29</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023), p.16.

*offers several recommendations regarding the opportunities for and barriers to ethical collaborative cataloguing and interpretation practice’.*<sup>30</sup>

*‘faced challenges associated with the slow re-opening of the heritage sector post lockdown– a lot of work went into formalising our project agreement due to the pressures on IROs and heritage organisations.’*<sup>31</sup>

## 6.4 Building a community with a shared vision

The interim stage indicates on the one hand that there is an appetite for organisations and individuals coming together to achieve a shared vision.

*‘The other potential thing you’re building – and you could call this a product – is the notion of the community. Now many museums and gallery, we do talk to each other...but life is fast and quite easily someone could do a project and other people haven’t noticed. And it seemed to me that part of what Towards the National Collection could have done more strongly and is trying to do and is continuing to do is building the fact that we are a community of people who work in a similar way, overlapping way, towards common goals, and what we do can be shared...you could say that the national collection is being an approach towards looking after our heritage rather than just one digital black box that people throw everything in...And I suppose that notion of planting a digital flag in the sand to start that growth has happened to a little bit, but that could have been a bit more.’ [Foundation participant]*

On the other hand, the interim stage did not reveal a clearly articulated and agreed shared vision concerning digital collections developments. Concerning a vision, there were some key strands from the sources consulted:

- As mentioned previously, many engagement session participants and survey respondents homed in on the importance of digitisation of collections.
- Furthermore, digital upskilling to address skills gaps in the cultural heritage sector was another common ask for future investment.
- The term ‘infrastructure’ was deployed by participants in engagement sessions. This was used to mean a range of hardware and software that would support digital databases.
- Any vision should be shared by organisations of different types, locations and sizes.

In the words of one engagement participant there is individual and collective responsibility derived from TaNC funding:

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<sup>30</sup> Pringle, Emily, Mavin, Helen, Greenhalgh, Tate, Dalal-Clayton, Anjalie, Rutherford, Ananda, Bramwell, Jane, Blackford, Katie, & Balukiewicz, Kim (2022)., p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Hughes, Lorna, Alexander, Marc, Baker, Hannah , Batista-Navarro, Riza, Hannaford, Ewan D, Nenandic, Goran & Willcox, Pip. (2022). First Report - Our Heritage, Our Stories: Linking and searching community-generated digital content to develop the people's national collection, p. 2. Zenodo.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7152511>

*'If I think about us as an IRO – did being involved in TaNC enhance our reputation as an IRO? No, but I think through that building of community, I think it could.'* [Foundation participant]

## 6.5 Provide clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward

In the survey, respondents were largely mixed about the success of TaNC in providing clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward: 26% agreed that TaNC is achieving this, while 19% disagreed and over half (53%) said they 'don't know' if TaNC is achieving this.

However, at a project-level, there was evidence that TaNC projects were being used as the basis for further funding applications:

*'I think we provided clear evidence to support enhanced funding going forward in that we've demonstrated that if you use these technologies it's cheaper and easier and there's the option to scale up. So some of those aspects came along and I think quite a few of the Foundation Projects looked at... That said, you know if you're going to have something big and complex and messy then you need to look at standards, you need to look at shared approaches to things. So I think that did come across. But again, because of the timing, they weren't then required in the next step.'* [Foundation participant]

*'The project we had led to other projects which don't have any other UK collaborators other than us, so those have become international.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Engagement session participants all felt their project has some sort of impact or utility that supports more funding. Many mentioned parts of their projects that are still resourced in some form, beyond the period of TaNC project funding. Others noted that they were actively seeking funding with collaborators they had met through TaNC:

*'We put in a joint bid through someone we met through TaNC. It didn't succeed in the end. But certainly extended my range of collaborators into GLAM sector.'* [COVID-19 participant]

Perhaps related to their project-level experience, all were confident that TaNC demonstrated the need for funding, and further investment in digital developments:

*'I think the need for something like this to be funded is clear. And bringing together different experts and different collections, TaNC demonstrates that this is needed.'* [COVID-19 participant]

*'TaNC has been described and discussed in relation to the planned infrastructure, funding for...things that are coming out of the AHRC. So, I think the impact on demonstrating the fact that it's a valid, useful area to put money into and it can be well spent and a lot of people are benefiting has come across because there's more discussions of more money'* [Foundation participant]

A few participants pointed out that these developments, and the money to support them is found at international-level, and with international collaborations:

*'I think what it has done has given us an excuse to go out and talk to more people about the work that we do and the fact that you know we can also build infrastructure, including digital infrastructure for the sector. So, one example of that is that just before the project started, I was invited out to a*

*workshop in the US where there were lots of other kind of heritage organizations and, you know, kind of Getty and folks like that who were interested in some of the work that was happening in the programme. And so, yeah, it's just a good excuse to talk about what we do.' [Foundation participant]*

The commissioned Consolidation report for Foundation Projects provided a good example of collaboration, but with limitations on what can and cannot be taken forward as dependent on resources:

*'The Heritage Connector project will focus on its work with Wikidata and will be at the center of an Early Career Fellowship funded by the Science Museum Group; the Deep Discoveries project's User Experience team at Newcastle University may continue working on the prototype separately, but currently there is no internal support from the National Archives to further develop it; Locating a National Collection's map interface is being utilised by other projects within the Pelagios network, but there is currently no additional internal support from the British Library; Practical Applications of IIF's work at the National Gallery is still being used within the institution and the IIF development is ongoing thanks to collaboration with the IIF Consortium. The Preserving and Sharing Born Digital and Hybrid Objects project continues its research on born-digital objects as it aligns with the Victoria & Albert Museum's mission and interests, with a doctoral student being employed to continue the work on born-digital objects in the museum's collection.'*<sup>32</sup>

## 6.6 Conclusion

This findings chapter includes interim results on TaNC's impact towards the digital collections research ecosystem.

In terms of TaNC benefits reaching across the UK, this was evidenced by the number of partner organisations based in different UK locations. Due to the set up with IROs and HEIs these were consequently based in large population centres. There were clearly efforts to include organisations, and people, based in as many parts of the UK as possible.

TaNC is advancing partnerships between the academic and cultural heritage sectors. Again, this is built into the programme, and its project funding requirements. There was evidence of TaNC creating a reason for new relationships as well as TaNC benefitting from existing partnerships. TaNC brought the rewarding, but somewhat challenging, nature of partnership working to organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of building a community with a shared vision, there is clearly an appetite for the cultural heritage sector creating and articulating such a vision. It is unclear at this stage whether parts of the sector, that is to say museums or libraries or archives, see this as shared at the sub-sector level or the GLAM sector level. Certainly, learnings from TaNC were seen as useful to inform a shared vision and way forward in meaningful digital developments.

Another objective of TaNC was to advance the case for enhanced funding. Already at this interim stage progress is being made in this regard. Those involved in completed TaNC projects are trying, and sometimes

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<sup>32</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023), p.15.

succeeding, in securing greater internal budgets or external investment to build on outputs they developed. There was a feeling that TaNC existing actually evidences the appetite and necessity for investment in this area at UK and international levels.

Chapter seven highlights key considerations raised by evaluation participants regarding TaNC's aims and objectives, their feedback and suggestions for the remaining programme period and beyond.

## 7. Key considerations from interim evaluation stage

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### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter contains key considerations for the TaNC Programme Directorate and Steering Group to review at this interim stage of summer 2023.

Firstly, TaNC's original objectives are discussed in terms of importance and performance. This section brings in the view of the broader cultural heritage sector, as responding to the survey issued in summer 2023.

Secondly feedback on the TaNC programme is summarised under funding, forming projects and encouraging connections.

The third section contains suggestions for the remainder of TaNC. These are the views of evaluation research participants and are grouped under ways for TaNC to make connections, publicise findings, welcome discussions and build legacy.

The fourth section groups suggestions for beyond the programme period. These are the views of evaluation research participants and are organised into the headings of priorities, skills, digitisation and data, and inclusivity.

### 7.2 Views on objectives and aim

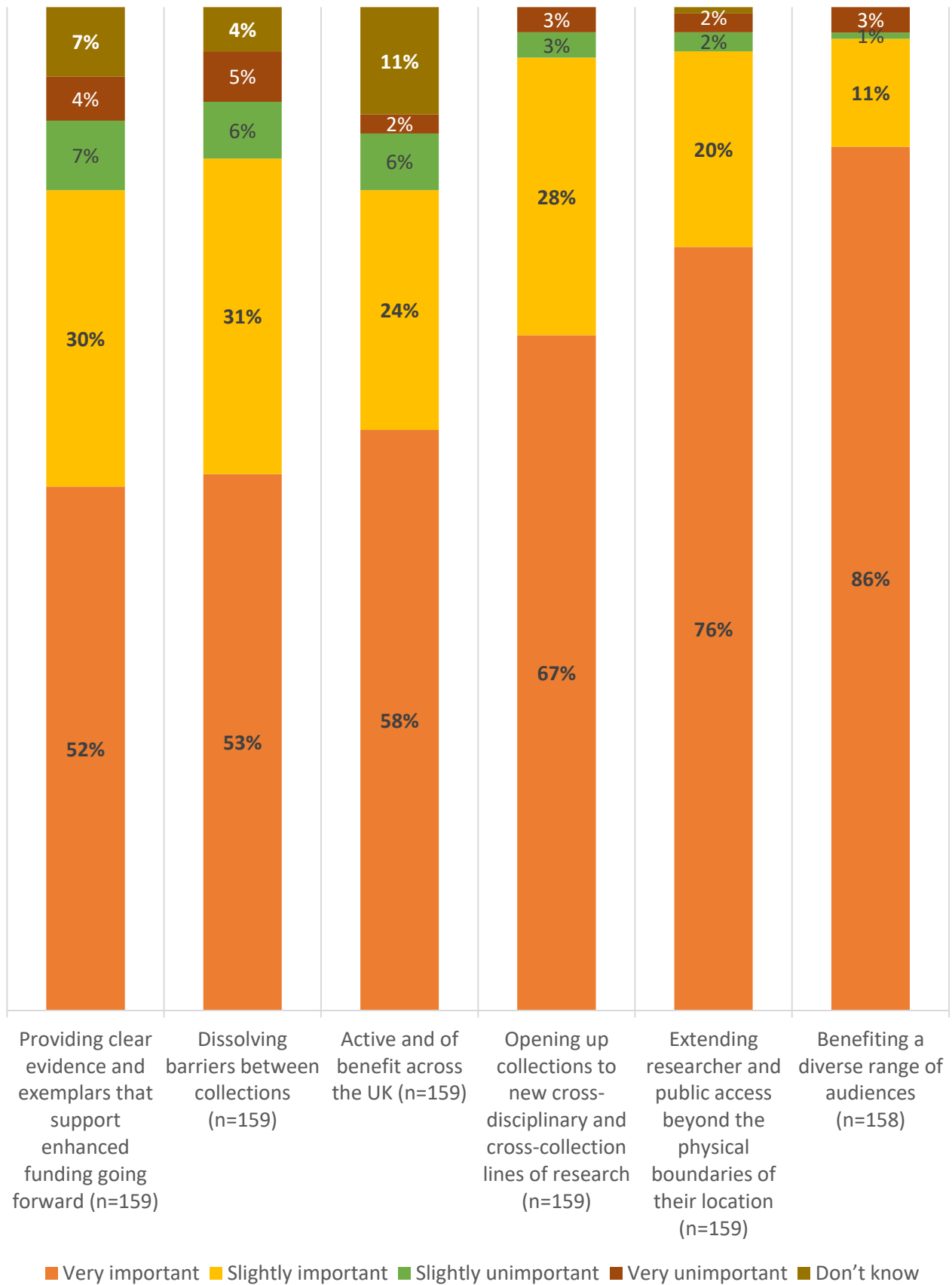
It is not possible, nor was it expected, for all TaNC projects to deliver all TaNC programme objectives (see section 2.2). As one engagement session participant explained:

*'Projects were in a sense so small it was actually quite difficult to like tick all these boxes [the objectives] because actually it's a relatively small amount of money...So I think they all did some of this, but in a way, they're all, in a sense, a lot of them were focused on particular bits of this.'* [Foundation participant]

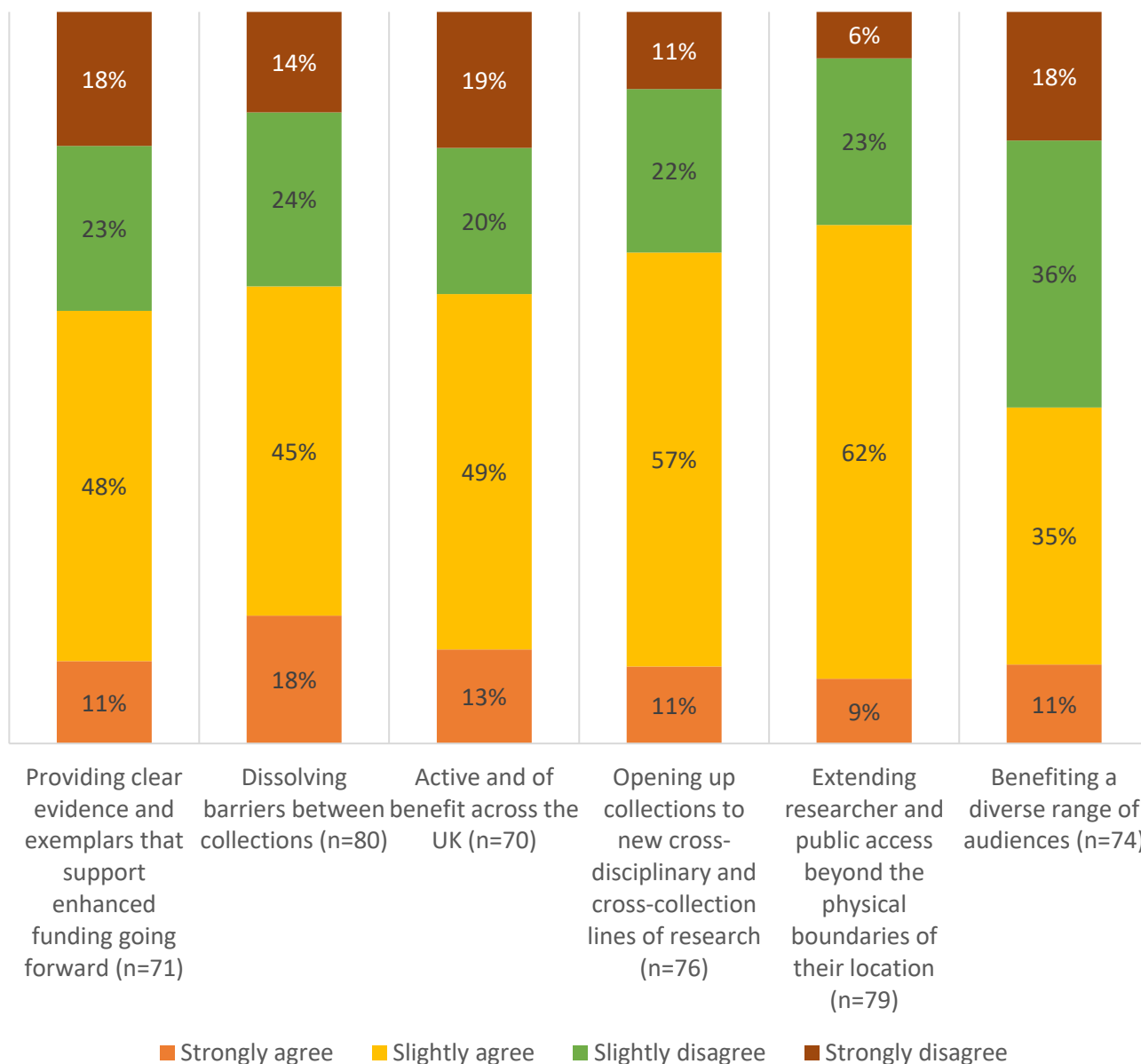
Indeed, it is important at this interim stage to consider how the various parts and layers of TaNC are combining to ultimately result in achieving the programme objectives. Interim findings (Chapters four, five and six) include evidence of TaNC working towards all of its original objectives.

Also, in the sector survey, respondents were asked about how important they considered TaNC's objectives and to give an importance rating for each (see figure 7.1)). 159 people gave a response to this question, including a minority responding 'don't know'.





**Figure 7.1: How important do you consider the following for the UK's GLAM sector?**



**Figure 7.2: Would you agree or disagree that Towards a National Collection is achieving the following objectives? Excluding ‘don’t know’ responses.**

In the sector survey, a question was included to gauge extent of agreement that TaNC was progressing towards achieving its objectives, rating each objective (see figure 7.2). 80 people responded to this question. In terms of importance, the highest importance rating was: ‘benefiting a diverse range of audiences’ (97% selected ‘very important’ or ‘slightly important’). Indeed, over eight in ten respondents agreed that each objective was important. This demonstrates very strong support from the cultural heritage sector towards the objectives of TaNC.

Next a question was asked to establish views on whether TaNC is achieving these objectives. Approximately half (between 47% and 54%) of survey respondents selected ‘don’t know’ as an answer response. This was largely the case for those without direct involvement in the TaNC programme or interaction with TaNC

communications channels. Excluding the ‘don’t know’ responses indicates perceived performance of TaNC towards its objectives (see figure 7.2).

The perception was that TaNC has most room for improvement towards ‘benefitting a diverse range of audiences’; of those with an opinion, a majority disagreed that TaNC was achieving this objective – with 54% of respondents selecting ‘slightly disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ (see section 5.4 for further elaboration). In contrast, a majority agreed (71% of respondents selected ‘slightly agree’ or ‘strongly agree’) that TaNC was ‘extending researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location’.

The next stage of the evaluation will involve a repeat of the cultural heritage sector survey, including questions on organisational-level impact. It will be interesting to compare results to see if these impacts have progressed with time.

The evaluation gathered feedback on TaNC. This included feedback on the purpose of the TaNC programme. Concerning TaNC’s aim and objective a few main points were frequently raised. Firstly, there were Issues with the terminology of ‘national’ as already discussed in the commissioned report, Digital Collections Audit.<sup>33</sup> On one hand, the wording of the objectives was seen to be very aspirational. The term ‘transform’ was taken to place unrealistic expectations of what TaNC could achieve. On the other hand, terms such as ‘begin’ were welcomed as more realistic.

The Congruence Engine was cited by respondents as a promising project for working towards a national collection. As the second report of the Discovery Project states:<sup>34</sup>

*‘A national collection as social machine will need a distributed and federated governance structure, one that enables local decision-making and contribution and does not require central control. A major focus of our next phase of work will be to understand what this might mean and how it might be designed. Industrial heritage is a record of British colonial expansion and capitalist extraction. To see the national collection as a social machine offers a means of understanding how better to approach this subject, by activating different collections, knowledge and positions.’*

## 7.3 Feedback on programme

Feedback was also provided on aspects of TaNC including:

- Funding processes and amounts,
- Project formation,
- Attempts at bringing people together.

These points are expanded on below, utilising engagement session quotes and published sources.

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<sup>33</sup> [Digital Collections Audit | Zenodo](#), pp.33-34.

<sup>34</sup> Boon, Tim, Butterworth, Alex, Graham, Helen, Rees, Arran, Sichiani, Anna Maria, Webb-Bourne, Katerina, & Winters, Jane. (2023). Second Report - The Congruence Engine: Digital Tools for New Collection-Based Industrial Histories, p.38. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7986810>

### 7.3.1 Funding

One participant explained that their perception was that, for the first project funding calls, there was:

*‘quite a lot of...cloak and daggery around the earlier phase of the programme compared to obviously kind of other kind of calls which have been...open’ [Foundation participant]*

This related back to a point already raised within the commissioned Consolidation Report for Foundation Projects:<sup>35</sup>

*‘An issue with timing has also been perceived at the stage of the setting-up of the Foundation Projects: in the implementation of the programme, insufficient time was allotted to establish meaningful partnerships, leading most projects to rely on pre-existing networks of individuals. This situation disproportionately benefited Independent Research Organisations with well-established infrastructures and research capabilities’.*

For the project funding, only a couple of issues were raised with the process. Firstly, participants raised that there had been delays in notification of COVID-19 Projects awards:

*‘I think the only hiccup in the project was the official notification of the decisions. And that’s due to administration processes under changing circumstances. And it affected all the COVID projects.’*  
[COVID-19 participant]

Secondly, those involved in Foundation Projects explained that it would have been ideal for Foundation Projects to end, take stock and then have time to reconfigure and build on that work when bidding for Discovery Projects – effectively sequencing a smaller-scale project into a large-scale project.

However, as explained in the commissioned Consolidation Report for Foundation Projects:<sup>36</sup>

*‘In the initial design of Towards a National Collection, the Foundation Projects also had a major role in feeding into the subsequent Discovery Projects. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this initial timeline changed, impacting the through-line between each phase of the programme’*

On further examination of the publicly available information on the Discovery Projects call, there were an extensive number of pre-funding call events.<sup>37</sup> This Discovery funding call did result in awards with intersection between Foundation and Discovery Projects:<sup>38</sup>

*‘Three of the Foundation Projects have directly fed into the ‘Discovery Projects’, Towards a National Collection’s third and larger round of funded projects (£14.5m): the five Discovery Projects selected are “harnessing the potential of new technology to dissolve barriers between collections, with the central aim of empowering and diversifying audiences by involving them in the research and creating new*

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<sup>35</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023), p.16.

<sup>36</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023). p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> [Five projects join the Towards a National Collection community – UKRI](#)

<sup>38</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023), p.13.

*ways for them to access and interact with collections. These Discovery Projects share not only objectives and approaches, but involve researchers from the Foundation Projects.”*

Despite publicity of the size of the overall TaNC budget, some of those directly involved in COVID-19 and Foundation Projects felt budgets were small for the volume of work each project required:

*‘I think the overall size of the budgets that were available didn't necessarily match the ambitions of the project, the ambition for the program, the ambition for the individual projects.’ [Foundation participant]*

In an unusual instance, an engagement session participant explained how an organisation stepped back from a project because of lack of capacity:

*‘I think again it comes back to funding and capacity...although we were keen to be involved, they were added onto our day jobs. So, nothing moved aside. We just had to find more space and more time. And as a result, [anonymised] actually had to step back from one of the projects...because we just didn't have capacity to actually deliver on that, which was a really uncomfortable situation and something that obviously we wish hadn't happened. But I think it was just, again, it was that we wanted to be involved and there was the motivation...but actually the funding and the way that our organization dealt with that funding made that quite challenging. And I think we would think very carefully about involvement in future projects as a result of that.’ [Foundation participant]*

This comment reveals there was more to this than limitations of budget, as it indicates that there is learning to be taken from organisation-level management of input to TaNC and ensuring internal staff capacity (see chapter 4).

### 7.3.2 Forming projects

In terms of feedback on forming projects, some engagement session participants had liked the freedom to collaboratively design a project:

*‘I think the emphasis on the cultural heritage organisations leading the way with the specific questions and ideas to explore was really beneficial. So not having this driven by academic questions that are coming from outside the sector was a really nice aspect of a funding model. And appreciated the kind of structure of the bidding process and ability to do work towards Discovery project and then for the COVID [project]. But it was a huge amount of work, but the model was good. And meant we had the team in place to go for the Covid bid.’ [COVID-19 participant]*

In contrast, others wished there had been more structure and guidance, particularly around expectations for public impact from projects (see section 5.4).

Many engagement session participants mentioned that they would have appreciated more collaboration with the other projects during the live project period. They acknowledged that TaNC did facilitate connections, including through the conference and online sessions. For example:

*‘Rather than directly exchanging results, as if we were all working on the same physics problem or something like that, it was interesting to hear different perspectives to the whole TaNC programme in*

*general. The whole ‘what is the point of a national collection’ point we went through a few times. And in that sense, it did provide a real space for collaborators. I think necessarily all the projects were quite dissimilar...The webinars to bring in people from similar projects internationally was good.’ [COVID-19 participant]*

### 7.3.3 Encouraging connections

Feedback from those attending the conference was positive, but there was a suggestion that it was a start – that is to say, it had brought senior figures in organisations together at a more strategic level, but more collaboration opportunities by those leading and delivering work within organisations, and feeding up to strategic levels, would be welcomed:

*‘The thing I was kind of bit concerned about and still I am to a degree was that it [the end of TaNC conference] presented itself as being kind of targeted at sort of movers and shakers and heads of organizations and so forth. And there’s no bad thing about having those people get some sense of what it’s kind of delivered and so on but I also feel that it’s actually the tech folk who are going to be delivering the next round, the curators who are directly dealing with the databases or the contents, who need to see stuff and kind of go and be inspired by it and think, “OK, we actually need to go speak to those guys because we want to implement that thing in our case”. And I think when you filter it through the CEO or the whatever, if the HR or marketing sees it and gets excited. It’s great that they get excited about it but they’re probably not in a position to you know talk about the fundamentals of the details or understand how those things [work]. It would have been good to have another event or second part of the event that was targeted at that kind of community who are really going to make use of this stuff, you know, in more kind of direct sense. If they have more money, you know, that could actually be quite a useful thing for them to do and again perhaps drawing on not just the Discovery but like the Foundation, you know the program as a whole and the various different kinds of things have emerged from it.’ [Foundation participant]*

The first report for the live Discovery Project, Sloane Lab, indicates that discussion has taken place at this delivery level on technical aspects:<sup>39</sup>

*‘Collaboration with other TaNC projects to date has centred around the technical aspects of the project, specifically on ontologies and vocabularies for data modelling. We have benefited from knowledge exchange with the UNPATH'D Waters project, who shared their Towards the UNPATH'D Waters Ontology draft report with us, which sets out "a core ontology to which UNPATH data providers will map their individual database schema, thereby ensuring interoperability between diverse resources" (UNPATH'D Waters 2021).’*

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<sup>39</sup> Nyhan, Julianne, James, Hanna, Vlachidis, Andreas, Flinn, Andrew, Pearlman, Nina, Carine, Mark, & Hill, Jeremy. (2022). First Report - Sloane Lab: Looking back to build future shared collections, p.22. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7152459>

## 7.4 Participant suggestions for remaining programme period

The sector survey asked for thoughts on whether there was anything else respondents would want from future investment in digital collections infrastructure. Most suggestions strayed into recommendations for beyond the TaNC programme period (see section 7.5). The sector survey also asked whether there was anything else respondents would suggest in order for TaNC to maximise its impact on their organisation or the wider sector (for example training, resources, knowledge sharing). Some suggestions were directed towards the Programme Directorate and Steering Committee for consideration. In addition, the engagement sessions contained suggestions from Foundation and COVID-19 Project participants. These have been thematically grouped below.

### 7.4.1 Making connections

As mentioned in the previous section, there is appetite for TaNC to facilitate connections between people who are in delivery roles within organisations. A sector survey respondent encouraged TaNC to: ‘proactively connect us to other TaNC work’.

Other suggestions included calls for connections between TaNC and commercial partners, for example a survey response desired for, ‘TaNC to investigate and fund research into how a collection can be used as an income generating source for the benefit of the larger organization through image licensing, cost recovery, external funding etc, larger commercial collection subscription models.’

More specifically, TaNC was encouraged to join the Europeana Aggregators Forum.<sup>40</sup>

There was great appetite to hear more about the learnings and progress made. Crucially there was desire to hear about challenges faced, failures, and technical aspects which did not work, as explained by one engagement session participant,

*‘[it’s] not realistic to expect projects to be innovative and all succeed. But interesting things have come out of TaNC. And maybe the fact that all of the sub-projects, they had such a wide variety of organisations, collections and expertise, so will be interesting to [see] what comes from the whole programme, not just our part.’ [COVID-19 participant]*

### 7.4.2 Publicising findings

Suggestions related to learning from TaNC to be made useful to different audiences.

For example, one participant, working for a university, desired TaNCs’ research findings to be shared through more traditional publication routes:

*‘I really like the idea of a special [journal] issue...that ties together the work that was done across the projects and how it relates to this grand vision of towards a national collection, it would be a nice way to put the work out there.’ [Foundation participant]*

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<sup>40</sup> [Europeana Aggregators Forum](#) | [Europeana PRO](#)

There was support for best practice sharing, upscaling approaches at organisational level and building on success. For example:

- 'highlighting existing successes such as Art UK' – in fact TaNC published a commissioned report on this in 2022,<sup>41</sup>
- 'Creating 'clear strategy and guidance papers' for organisations to follow'
- 'TaNC is very good at producing thorough reports, but the next stage needs to be transferable resources and outputs that organisations can easily use and adapt.'
- 'Better articulation of what's innovative in general, as opposed to just innovative for the GLAM sector. Where might some of the tools, techniques, and learning points be adopted by others?'

TaNC utilising its communications channels to be a conversation leader was another suggestion from the survey responses, for example: 'engage in conversation on the social media channel about the programme rather than just be a broadcast medium.'

### 7.4.3 Legacy building

The commissioned Consolidation Report for Foundation Projects provides a list of recommendations for both the Towards a National Collection programme and the future infrastructure, and for the sector more broadly, as well as some additional further recommendations. This points out:<sup>42</sup>

*'The primary concern regarding preservation and maintenance of networks and work achieved during the project is what happens post-project.'*

As already mentioned, people involved in projects wanted legacy to be considered at a project, organisational and programme level:

*'There will be lots of stuff that is new, but what would be really innovative is [if] it is carried forward and not festering at the end of the project. And as far as I know no exit plans yet for the Discovery projects. So, I would spend some time identifying what is innovative and how do we sustain that beyond the funding. So, bits of kit and workflows etc. They don't seem to be thinking about that seriously as yet' [COVID-19 participant]*

Indeed, legacy for project-level impacts was frequently highlighted as a consideration:

*'There's some stuff happening, but whether it survives the end of the projects is yet to be seen, I've not felt anything transforming yet.' [COVID-19 participant]*

*'The impact of the work that the Foundation Projects did...will depend on what happens next...you need to make use of these benefits that we've identified or at least speak to these benefits we've identified if there's an alternative that does the same thing and that will be a matter of timing.'*  
[Foundation participant]

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<sup>41</sup> McNeill, Aidan. (2022). Art UK: Opening Up Access to the Nation's Art. Zenodo.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6334193>

<sup>42</sup> Paltrinieri, Carlotta. (2023), p. 16.



*‘But this is the tricky bit with research projects, is you do the research project because you're interested in an idea, but then how you actually have the opportunity to extend that even within your own organizations – tricky. And that's true with some of the stuff we did. We haven't been able to exploit it as quickly as I would have liked to do because other things come along. But that kind of how do you continue the journey? And there's only so much money. And if you want to continue the journey and expand the number of people involved in the conversation, the money shrinks.’ [Foundation participant]*

Survey respondents also acknowledged barriers to achieving positive legacy, even amongst organisations directly involved, for example: ‘The problem is that contributing organisations haven't the IT capacity to take advantage of the exciting work coming out of TaNC’.

## 7.5 Participant suggestions for beyond the programme period

This section includes suggestions for beyond the programme period. It opens with results from the sector survey on priorities for future investment.

Thereafter, suggestions are grouped under the themes of skills, digitisation and data and inclusivity.

This report does not include all the technical suggestions for ways to advance digital infrastructure.

### 7.5.1 Priorities

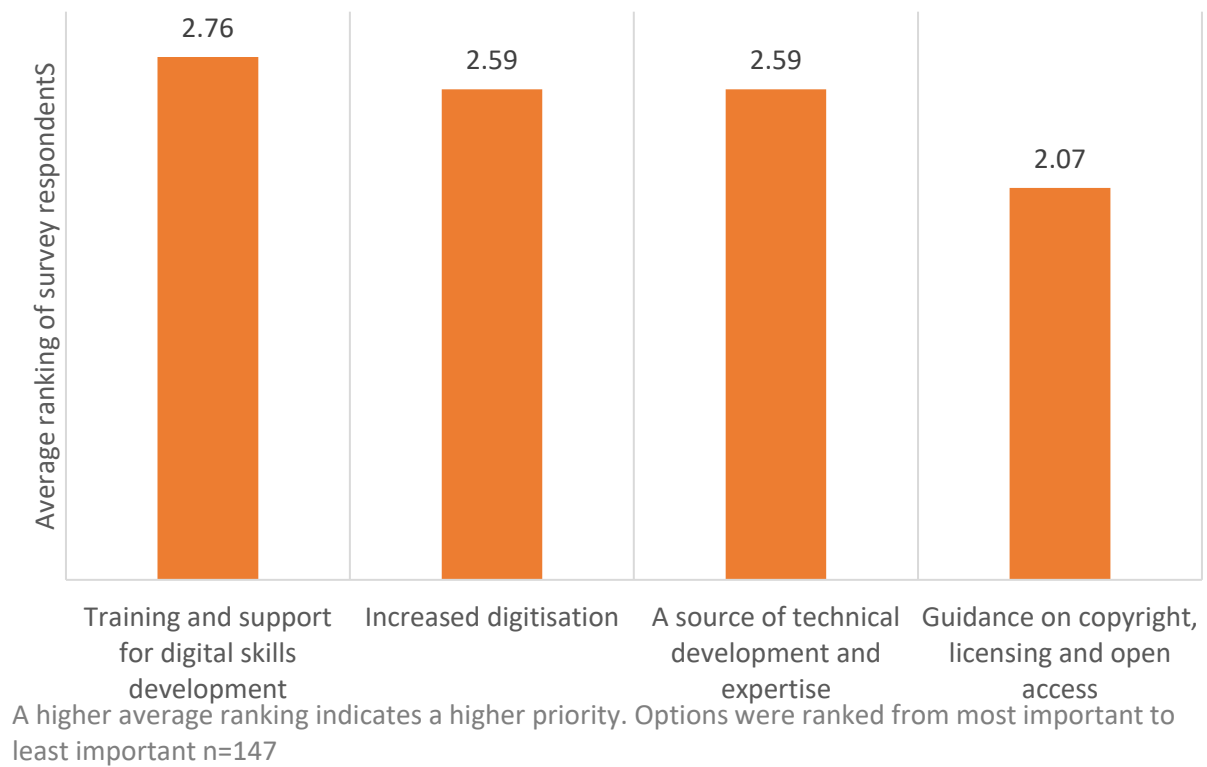
The cultural heritage sector survey asked respondents to rank four priorities for future investment, from Most important, to Least important (see figure 7.3). Calculating the average ratings shows the most important priority was ‘training and support for digital skills development’.

Delegates at TaNC’s conference: Unlocking the Potential of Digital Collections, which took place in April 2023, were asked the same question and given three answer options to rank (see figure 7.4). The order of importance was similar, with ‘training and support for digital skills development’ with the highest average score.

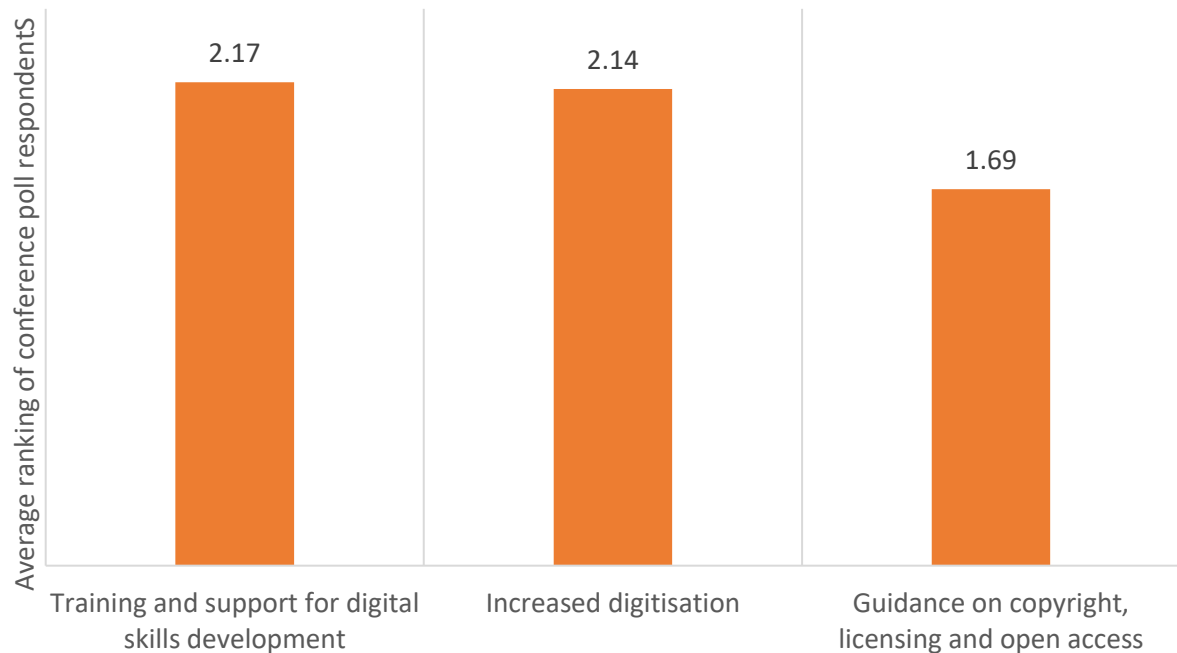
The cultural heritage sector survey later asked respondents to rate the importance of four desires for future digital infrastructure in their sector from Most important, to Least important (see figure 7.5). The option of ‘connect and cross-search data from different institutions’ was the fore runner.

Delegates at Unlocking the Potential of Digital Collections were asked a similar question - to rate the importance of the same four desires for future digital infrastructure for themselves (see figure 7.6). The option of ‘connect and cross-search data from different institutions’ was also the fore runner.

At Unlocking the Potential of Digital Collections, delegates were also asked an open question - Is there anything else you want from future investment in digital collections infrastructure? Figure 7.7 shows a Wordcloud generated by Slido with the highest instances of response. Ethics and Sustainability were the two most frequently mentioned words within responses.

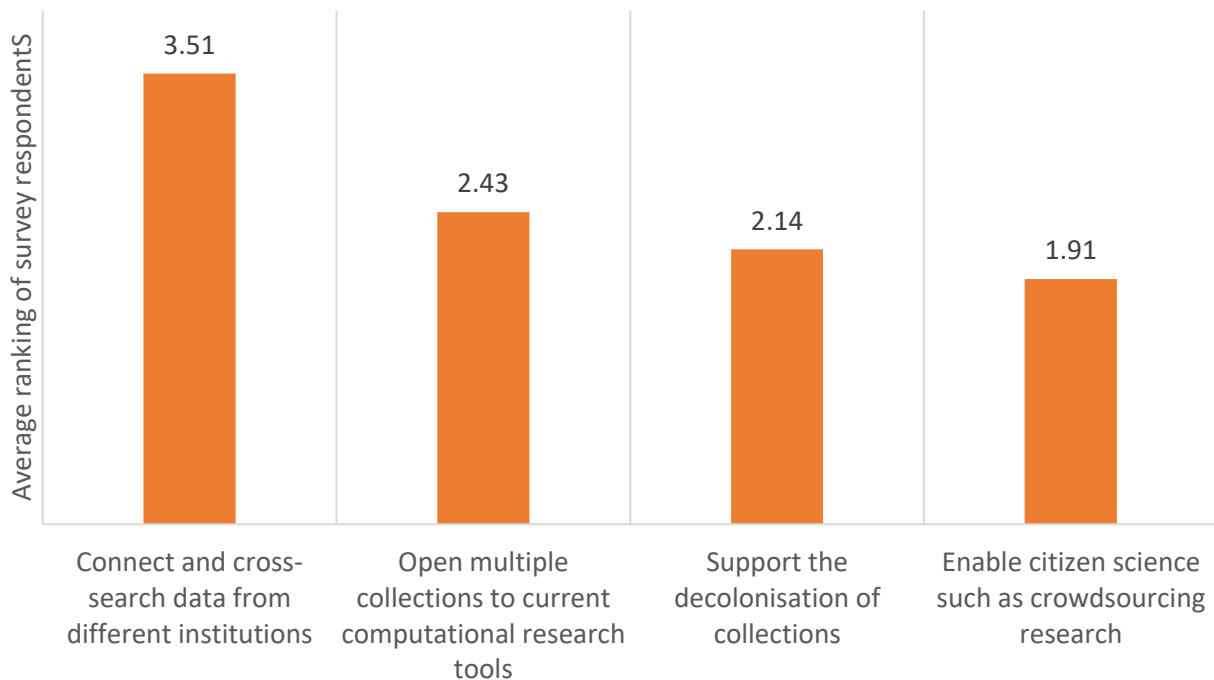


**Figure 7.3: What are your priorities for future investment? Results from sector survey, July 2023**



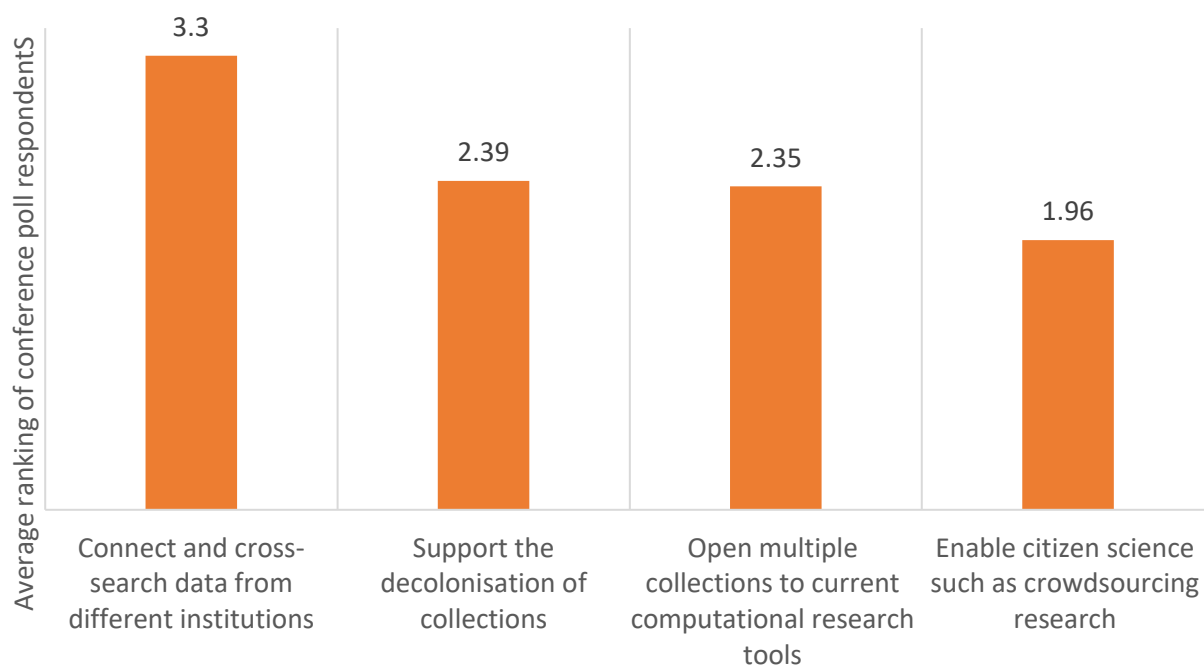
A higher average ranking indicates a higher priority. Options were ranked from most important to east important n=72

**Figure 7.4: What are your priorities for future investment? Results from live poll at TaNC Conference, April 2023**



A higher average ranking indicates a higher priority. Options were ranked from most important to least important n=136

**Figure 7.5: What do you want a future digital infrastructure to do for the sector? Results from sector survey, July 2023**



A higher average ranking indicates a higher priority. Options were ranked from most important to least important n=92

**Figure 7.6 What would you like a future infrastructure to do for you? Results from live poll at TaNC Conference, April 2023**

Is there anything else you want from future investment in digital collections infrastructure?



Figure 7.7: Wordcloud from Slido live poll at TaNC Conference, April 2023

## 7.5.2 Skills

Project reports also included calls for skills and use of digital analytics:

*'It is unclear how much museums' interests in digital social engagement are specifically linked to the conditions of the pandemic. Further consideration of the unique impacts of the pandemic on the social media usage and associated training needs of museums is advised before Towards a National Collection assumes this is a priority area for investment in the long-term.'*<sup>43</sup>

A survey respondent emphasised the need to think beyond fixing skills gaps, to developing roles and talent in the cultural heritage sector: 'In addition to jobs skills training, more supported pathways into the sector specifically in digital roles.'

<sup>43</sup> Cooper, Adrian, Gosling, Kevin, Kennedy, Anra, Perry, Sara, Reed, Darren, Richards, Julian, Smith, Neil, Torreggiani, Anne, & Wright, Holly. (2022), p.2.

One quote from the engagement sessions provides a suggestion on how to pool skills:

*'I think some huge, huge national investment that doesn't sit within any one institutional organization and is open to all kinds of disciplines and people from any kind of research organization to come and spend time there. So I'm thinking like an infrastructure equivalent to CERN, you know, the Large Hadron Collider, where people go and do a period of time there as part of their job or can apply for it, so that we can focus together on building the same thing. So we're not all reinventing the wheel and a huge focus on standards because many elements of what we're doing are already being addressed elsewhere in the community. And the trickiness about it is, is turning it from a project into a service. So we need some joined up thinking around that. Let's not reinvent the wheel, let's just use what's out there already and if it isn't fit for purpose, that's what these projects will have highlighted. So let's put a huge amount of effort into that joint, communal, global effort. Often global. Yeah, there we are - loads of money, please.'* [Foundation participant]

### 7.5.3 Digitisation and data

A point of contention was revealed in the sector survey on open access. Some responses called for its extension and safeguarding. Others touched on open access having negative repercussions for organisations including lost income. This indicates that there is still an underlying debate which may underpin any future direction of digital developments. Indeed, commissioned research highlighted barriers to open access:

*'...the sector's ongoing focus on maintaining exclusive rights in, and thus control over, the reproduction media produced by such technologies risks both TaNC's aims and crystallizing a barrier that thwarts open access to a digital national collection. This study finds the focus on copyright is not only misplaced, but also seriously impeding the potential of the UK's cultural heritage collections for GLAMs, their wider public(s) and our cultural and creative industries.'*<sup>44</sup>

Survey respondents also called for money and resources to support future developments. For example:

- 'I'd like a funding and policy-based acknowledgement of the importance of funding digitising collections, across the UK.'
- 'More direct investment in organisations providing data for projects.'

A critical, but valuable analogy was provided by another participant in the engagement sessions:

*'It would have been much better to address the core infrastructure problem first, and then had a big dataset to play with later. So, the analogy for the museums data service is we are gathering together the data as the water into a big reservoir and we provide the pipe for everyone to then use the water how they will. And what TaNC is trying to do is create the waterworks at Versailles, very, very fancy and impressive, but not solving of the fundamental problem of how the water flows around to the users. If you were going to do TaNC 2 it would be better to focus on linking up with the infrastructure*

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<sup>44</sup> Andrea Wallace. (2022). A Culture of Copyright: A scoping study on open access to digital cultural heritage collections in the UK. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6242611>

*projects so if you are thinking of putting £3m into an AI project you want Big Data to play with. You need a lot more data to do more interesting things.’ [COVID-19 participant]*

## 7.5.4 Inclusivity

Beyond TaNC and its UKRI derived funding, people in the cultural heritage sector providing thoughts through the sector survey and the engagement sessions frequently raised that developments, and investment, should include smaller organisations. Therefore, organisations who do not have IRO status, nor are funded directly by governments, are desirous of a place at the table in any conversations about what happens beyond the TaNC programme.

The sector survey also asked for thoughts on whether there is anything else respondents want from future investment in digital collections infrastructure. Many of the points related to the inclusion of small sized cultural heritage organisations in developments including calls for:

- ‘a shared collaborative infrastructure for mid to small size GLAM institutions who do not have any developers in-house.’
- ‘To be properly inclusive – so projects don’t only concentrate on large/national collections but include a diverse range of collecting institutions.’
- ‘Make it easier for smaller institutions to get support and get involved.’
- ‘Enable small archives to participate. Remove cost barriers.’
- ‘Our tech can be limited, and our skills pools reduced. We need a joined up national aggregated data service’ [respondent from volunteer-led GLAM organisation].
- ‘Digital collections infrastructure to break into the regular, regional archive, museum and library services, and not be the preserve of academic, specialist or intellectually privileged institutions.’
- ‘By starting with a network, you could reach out to understand the resource and training needs of smaller institutions.’

Respondents also raised the importance of initiatives involving different specialists equitably:

- ‘Co-development through involvement of both digital experts and subject specialists who have expertise in the content. It is still the case that the contribution of the collections specialist is not sufficiently valued or is not included when constructing budgets so that their contribution is expected to be given for free.’

Also, a survey response mentioned that advances through research must have practical application: ‘move beyond research projects to real-life deployment on a continuing basis.’

Lastly, a very important finding for any future project within the cultural heritage sector was shared in one of the Foundation reports:<sup>45</sup>

- ‘Provisional Semantics addressed the cultures and lives of Black people and people of colour, and the project might not have encountered some of the challenges it faced if more people of colour

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<sup>45</sup> Pringle, Emily, Mavin, Helen, Greenhalgh, Tate, Dalal-Clayton, Anjalie, Rutherford, Ananda, Bramwell, Jane, Blackford, Katie, & Balukiewicz, Kim. (2022), p.39

had been involved in the research design and implementation. A key finding from the project overall is, therefore, that research projects are impacted by the makeup of the research team, notably in terms of whether that team has appropriate subject specialist expertise and lived experience.'

## 7.6 Conclusion

Crucially, the sector survey showed broad and strong support for all of TaNC's objectives and evidenced wider interest in the results of TaNC beyond those directly involved in projects.

The sector survey indicated that the TaNC objective with the highest level of importance was 'benefitting a diverse range of audiences'. Also, albeit based on a small sub-sample of individuals involved in projects, that this objective had most room for TaNC to improve.

Feedback on the programme from various sources included opinions on the aims and objectives of TaNC and their suitability and achievability. Furthermore, feedback was given on TaNC funding processes, formation of projects and attempts to encourage connections and networking.

Participant suggestions for the remaining programme period included suggestions for brokering connections between individuals and organisations, as well as ways for TaNC to extend the reach and accessibility of findings. TaNC was encouraged to lead discussions on ways forward for digital collections and to remember to support the building of legacy. Suggestions relevant to beyond the period of TaNC related to skills development, digitisation and data, and ensuring inclusivity.

Chapter eight includes a number of recommendations made by the evaluators, solely based upon the evaluation findings. These are for the consideration of TaNC's Programme Directorate and Steering Committee.

## 8. Recommendations

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This final chapter contains recommendations from the commissioned evaluators. All recommendations are based on the secondary and primary sources consulted for this interim evaluation.

The evaluators acknowledge that not all suggestions may be practically followed within the remit and resource of the Programme Directorate. Furthermore, it may not be practical to make adjustments to projects, or support for TaNC projects which have already been awarded, including the active Discovery Projects.

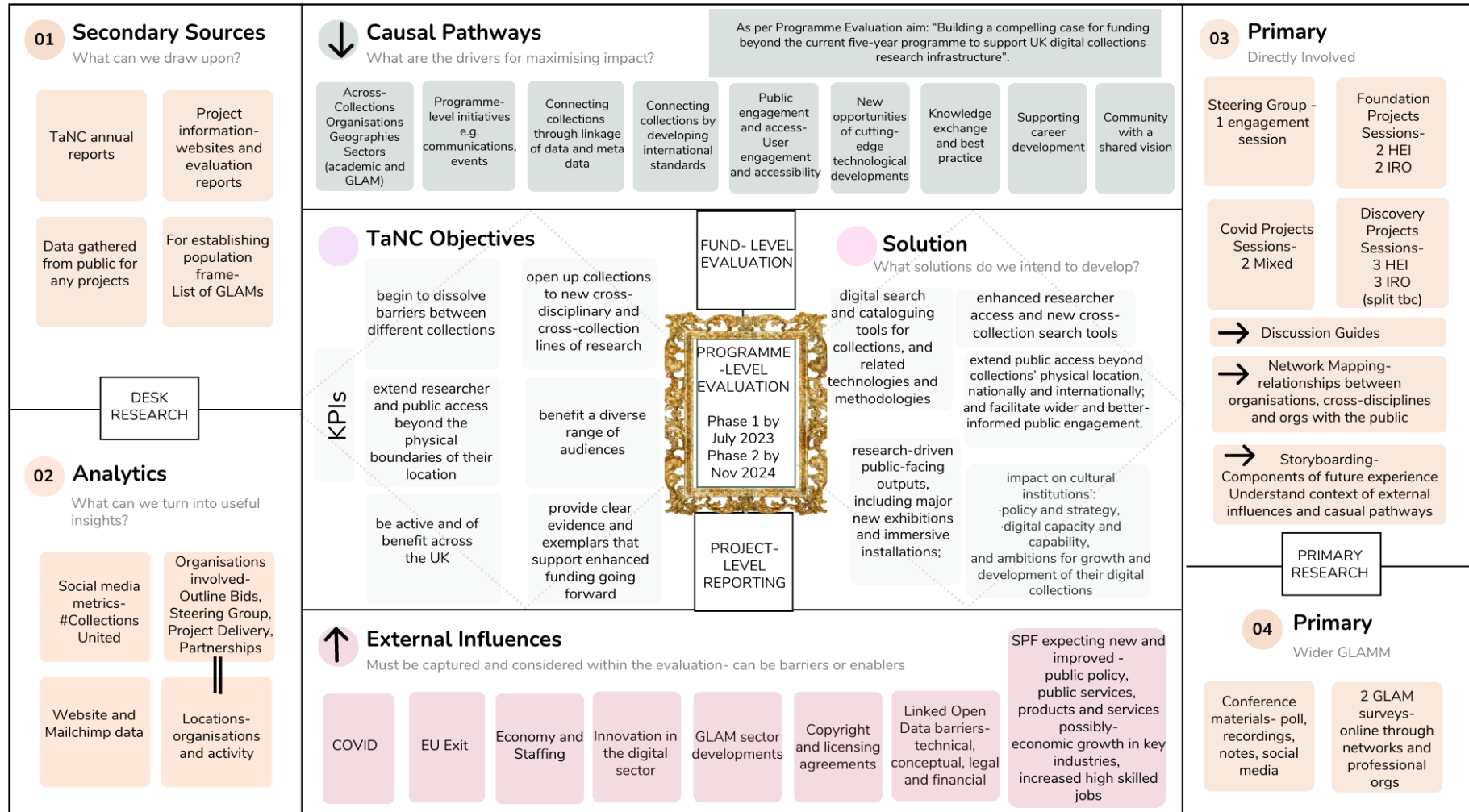
All the same, the recommendations are intended to be helpful for the remaining period of the programme, and for discussions on future developments beyond the TaNC programme.

1. TaNC should keep forging connections across organisations and disciplines, but also encourage breaking down of barriers between acknowledged hierarchies within the cultural heritage sector and divides between museums, archives, libraries, and other cultural heritage organisations.
2. TaNC should consider dissemination of learning through different types of output aimed at international academic audiences and cultural heritage practitioners. These could be closed sources available to subscribers or members but may tap into existing readerships and wider networks. This should only be considered in addition to an open knowledge approach.
3. TaNC should consider whether to act more in a thought leadership role and encourage discussion. Existing channels could be utilised further including TaNC's blog. The Programme Directorate could curate this content, with key figures in TaNC delivery across sectors to lead the thoughts and conversation.
4. TaNC could commission research to gather perspectives from the wider higher education sector on ways to build legacy and ensure progress. These findings could be compared to suggestions from the cultural heritage sector and the project participants contained in this evaluation report.
5. TaNC should emphasise how it supports innovation. By its very nature innovation involves failures and successes. Through sharing what did not work and what did work from TaNC projects, TaNC will generate value for new and improved products and services.
6. TaNC should take steps to ensure that medium and small sized cultural heritage organisations see value from the programme. This could involve encouraging TaNC projects to consider current and potential applicability of digital developments to smaller archives, museums, libraries, and heritage institutions. It could also consist of resourcing outputs such as short 'how to' guidance notes, derived from more substantial and technical reporting.
7. TaNC could report findings on organisational-level impacts of TaNC within organisational forums. Learnings from their experiences of TaNC should help inform any future collaborative initiatives with lead cultural heritage organisations such as IROs.



8. TaNC's interim evaluation has further evidenced strong desire and importance placed by cultural heritage sectors on benefitting diverse audiences. Future funding bids by the cultural heritage sector should consider how to incorporate digital analytics and social science skills in order to better understand the impacts of any digital developments on audiences.
9. Even at the interim stage, and with awards of project funding completed, there was debate around the fundamental premise of TaNC and what 'Towards a National Collection' should or does mean in practice. TaNC could embrace this debate and use it to fuel conversation on what an inclusive, shared vision consists of, and how this is best achieved.
10. TaNC should continue to bring a programme-level perspective to further discussions on securing future investment beyond 2025. This should be based on latest information from TaNC through project reporting, commissioned research, informal feedback, and evaluation findings.

# Appendix A: Programme Evaluation Theory of Change Model



## Appendix B: Reference List for Desk Research

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### Commissioned Reports

- Andrea Wallace. (2022). A Culture of Copyright: A scoping study on open access to digital cultural heritage collections in the UK. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6242611>
- Bailey-Ross, Claire. (2021). Online User Research Literature Review: UK Gallery, Library, Archive and Museum (GLAM) Digital Collection. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5779826>
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- Woodley, Sophia, & Towell, Patrick. (2022). User Research. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6684165>

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- Pringle, Emily, Mavin, Helen, Greenhaigh, Tate, & Dalal-Clayton, Anjalie (2020). Provisional Semantics: A Towards a National Collection Foundation Project Interim Report. <https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/Provisional%20Semantics.pdf>

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<https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/Heritage%20Connector.pdf>

Willcox, Pip, Lintott, Christopher, Haston, Elspeth, & Samon, Martin (2020). Engaging Crowds: A Towards a National Collection Foundation Project Interim Report.

<https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-01/Engaging%20Crowds.pdf>

## Foundation Projects Final Reports

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Kane, Natalie, Arrigoni, Gabriella, McKim, Joel, McConnachie, Stephen, & Palmer, Richard. (2022). Preserving and Sharing Born Digital and Hybrid Objects Across the National Collection. Zenodo.

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## Discovery Projects First Reports

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Hughes, Lorna, Alexander, Marc, Baker, Hannah, Batista-Navarro, Riza, Hannaford, Ewan D, Nenandic, Goran & Willcox, Pip. (2022). First Report - Our Heritage, Our Stories: Linking and searching community-generated digital content to develop the people's national collection. Zenodo.

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# Appendix C: Engagement Sessions Discussion Guide

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Discussion Guide, v.1 May 2023

Note this is the core discussion guide for engagement sessions with people involved in Foundation, Discovery and COVID-19 Projects

Note the participants will have received- privacy notice, and information in advance.

Key: **Blue Underline**- prioritise

## Set up

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team

As you know, we are contracted as evaluators of the Towards a National Collection (TaNC) Programme.

Welcome to the engagement session–

- Explain the discussion will last up to 2 hours, including a break in the middle.
- This time will incorporate time for discussion and a participatory exercise
- There will be plenty of time to get your views across and discuss issues between yourselves, something we encourage; my role is to keep the conversation flowing, ensuring we cover the broad areas we need to and ask any follow-up questions,
- Fully anonymous and confidential; The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines.
- Request permission to record discussion – with your permission I will record the discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion.
- The recording will not be shared with the Programme Directorate, and we will delete the recording when our analysis is complete.

Do you have any questions before we start?

## Background and introduction TaNC

**Please tell us your role and how you were involved in TaNC- which project?**

**When did everyone here get involved with TaNC? Was it from project application, at the start of the projects or later on?**

**What were your main motivations for getting involved in TaNC?**

**How did TaNC feature in your day to day?**

Prompt- heavily involved, on the periphery

Prompt- single or multiple TaNC projects

Prompt- other complimentary work during this time

Prompt- working with colleagues on TaNC/ working with people in other organisations on TaNC/ engaging with TaNC programme staff

### **Do you have any thoughts or feedback on the funding model?**

Prompt- participation of diverse range of organisations

## **TaNC objectives**

### **What does 'a national collection' mean to you?**

Prompt- feeling, associations, degree of support

I'm going to turn to TaNC's objectives and ask for your views on those. We really welcome your thoughts and discussion.

FACILITATOR SHARES SLIDE/ CHAT WITH EACH OBJECTIVE

- **Begin to dissolve barriers between collections**
- **Extend researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location,**
- **Be active and of benefit across the UK,**
- **Open up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research**
- **Benefit a diverse range of audiences,**
- **Provide clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward**

Do you think this objective is important? Why/ why not?

What progress do you think the TaNC projects you were involved with made towards achieving this?

What progress do you think the TaNC programme overall has made towards achieving this?

### **What challenges did you experience through TaNC?**

PROMPT: COVID-19, Brexit, Economic conditions, Technology limitations

FOLLOW UP: How did that impact your project and its outcomes?

### **What opportunities did you find through TaNC?**

PROMPT: TaNC governance, in-kind contributions from participating institutions, technology developments, knowledge exchange, social media engagement

FOLLOW UP: How did that impact your project and its outcomes?

## **Project reflections relevant for the Programme evaluation**

How do you think TaNC is contributing to creation of job opportunities?

FOLLOW UP: Any examples from TaNC project?

How do you think TaNC is contributing to skills development opportunities?

FOLLOW UP: Any examples from TaNC project?

In what ways do you think TaNC is enhancing the reputation of UK's GLAM sector?



FOLLOW UP: Any examples from TaNC project?

In what ways do you think TaNC is embedding Equalities Diversity and Inclusion agendas?

FOLLOW UP: Any examples from TaNC project?

## Collaboration

We are keen to hear your views on TaNC enabling an effective collaborative environment.

### Do you have any examples of the following?

- New relationships between organisations, cross-disciplines and orgs with the public
- Productive partnerships
- Addressing siloed working
- Cross-disciplinary working
- Working between HEI researchers and GLAM professionals

### What would you advise to encourage meaningful collaboration? –

#### PROMPT- approaches, mechanisms, support

## Future Focus

### To what extent would you agree or disagree with these statements?

- TaNC is transforming digital search
- TaNC is transforming digital research capability
- TaNC is transforming public engagement
- TaNC has produced innovation?

FACILITATOR TO ADD INTO ZOOM POLL- DISPLAY RESULTS ANONYMOUSLY- STRONGLY AGREE, SLIGHTLY AGREE, SLIGHTLY DISAGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE, DON'T KNOW

FOLLOW UP: Why do you agree or disagree?

FOLLOW UP: Do you have any suggestions?

### Looking to the future, how is UK digital collections research infrastructure best improved?

### How would you build a compelling case for funding beyond the current five year TaNC programme?- any recommendations for the TaNC team?

## Conclusions and wrap-up

Thank you very much for the discussion, is there anything not already covered that you would like to mention?

## Appendix D: TaNC Projects

Foundation Projects			
Project Name	Duration	Involved Organisations	Web presence
Heritage Connector	February 2020-December 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science Museum Group</li> <li>• University of London</li> <li>• Victoria and Albert Museum (V&amp;A)</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Heritage Connector: Transforming text into data to extract meaning and make connections - Science Museum Group</a>
Provisional Semantics	February 2020-February 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tate</li> <li>• Imperial War Museums</li> <li>• National Trust</li> <li>• University of the Arts London</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Provisional Semantics   Tate</a>
Practical Applications of IIF	February 2020-April 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Gallery</li> <li>• British Library</li> <li>• The National Portrait Gallery</li> <li>• University of Edinburgh</li> </ul>	<a href="#">TANC - IIF - index (tanc-ahrc.github.io)</a>
Persistent Identifiers	February 2020-January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The British Library</li> <li>• Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh</li> <li>• University of Glasgow</li> <li>• The National Gallery</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Persistent Identifiers GitHub Page</a>

Deep Discoveries	February 2020- July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Archives</li> <li>• University of Surrey</li> <li>• Victoria &amp; Albert Museum</li> <li>• Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Deep Discoveries GitHub page</a>
Engaging Crowds	February 2020- April 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Archives</li> <li>• University of Oxford</li> <li>• Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh</li> <li>• National Maritime Museum</li> </ul>	<a href="#">TANC Engaging Crowds (tanc-ahrc.github.io)</a>
Locating a National Collection	February 2020- July 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British Library</li> <li>• University of Exeter</li> <li>• The National Trust</li> <li>• Historical Royal Palaces</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Locating a National Collection - The British Library (bl.uk)</a>
Preserving and Sharing Born Digital and Hybrid Objects	February 2020- March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victoria &amp; Albert Museum (V&amp;A)</li> <li>• Birkbeck College</li> <li>• British Film Institute</li> </ul>	<a href="#">V&amp;A · Preserving And Sharing Born Digital And Hybrid Objects (vam.ac.uk)</a>

Covid-19 Projects			
Project Name	Duration	Involved Organisations	Web presence
Digital Footprints and Search Pathways: Working with National Collections in Scotland during COVID-19 Lockdown to Design Future Online Provision	April 2021- March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Strathclyde</li> <li>• University of Edinburgh</li> <li>• National Museums Scotland</li> <li>• National Galleries of Scotland</li> </ul>	<a href="http://strath.ac.uk">Digital Footprints – Working with national collections in Scotland during the Covid-19 lockdown to design future online provision (strath.ac.uk)</a>
Making it FAIR: Understanding the Lockdown ‘Digital Divide’ and the Implications for the Development of UK Digital Infrastructures	January 2021- November 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of York</li> <li>• Museum of London Archaeology</li> <li>• The Collections Trust</li> <li>• Culture24</li> <li>• The Audience Agency</li> <li>• Intelligent Heritage &amp; Knowledge Integration</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.makingitfair.org">Making it FAIR</a>
Visitor Interaction and Machine Curation in the Virtual Liverpool Biennial	January 2021- August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Durham</li> <li>• Liverpool John Moores University</li> <li>• Liverpool Biennial</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.liverpoolbiennial.com">Visitor Interaction and Machine Curation in the Virtual Liverpool Biennial</a>

Discovery Projects			
Project Name	Duration	Involved Organisations	Web presence
The Congruence Engine: Digital Tools for New Collections-Based Industrial Histories	November 2021-Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science Museum Group</li> <li>• British Film Institute</li> <li>• National Museums Scotland</li> <li>• Historic Building &amp; Monuments Commission for England</li> <li>• National Museum Wales &amp; Northern Ireland</li> <li>• The National Archives</li> <li>• National Trust</li> <li>• The V&amp;A</li> <li>• Universities of Leeds, London, &amp; Liverpool</li> <li>• BBC History</li> <li>• Birmingham Museums Trust</li> <li>• BT Heritage &amp; Archives</li> <li>• Grace's Guide to Industrial History</li> <li>• Isis Bibliography of the History of Science</li> <li>• Saltire World Heritage Education Association</li> <li>• Society for the History of Technology</li> <li>• Whipple Museum of the History of Science</li> <li>• Tyne &amp; Wear Archives &amp; Museums</li> <li>• Bradford Museums and Galleries</li> <li>• Wikimedia UK</li> <li>• Manchester Digital Laboratory</li> </ul>	<a href="#">The Congruence Engine</a>

<p>Our Heritage, Our Stories: Linking and Searching Community-Generated Digital Content to Develop the People's National Collection</p>	<p>October 2021-Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Glasgow</li> <li>• The National Archives</li> <li>• Tate</li> <li>• British Museum</li> <li>• University of Manchester</li> <li>• Association for Learning Technology</li> <li>• Digital Preservation coalition</li> <li>• Software Sustainability Institute</li> <li>• Archives+</li> <li>• Dictionaries of the Scots Language</li> <li>• National Lottery Heritage Fund</li> <li>• National Library of Scotland &amp; Wales</li> <li>• Public Record Office of Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Wikimedia UK</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Our Heritage, Our Stories</a></p>
<p>Transforming Collections: Reimagining Art, Nation and Heritage</p>	<p>November 2021-Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of the Arts London</li> <li>• Tate</li> <li>• Arts Council Collection</li> <li>• Art Fund</li> <li>• Art UK</li> <li>• Birmingham Museums Trust</li> <li>• British Council Collection</li> <li>• Contemporary Art Society</li> <li>• Glasgow Museums</li> <li>• Institute of International Visual Art</li> <li>• JISC Archives hub</li> <li>• Manchester Art Gallery</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Transforming Collections</a></p>

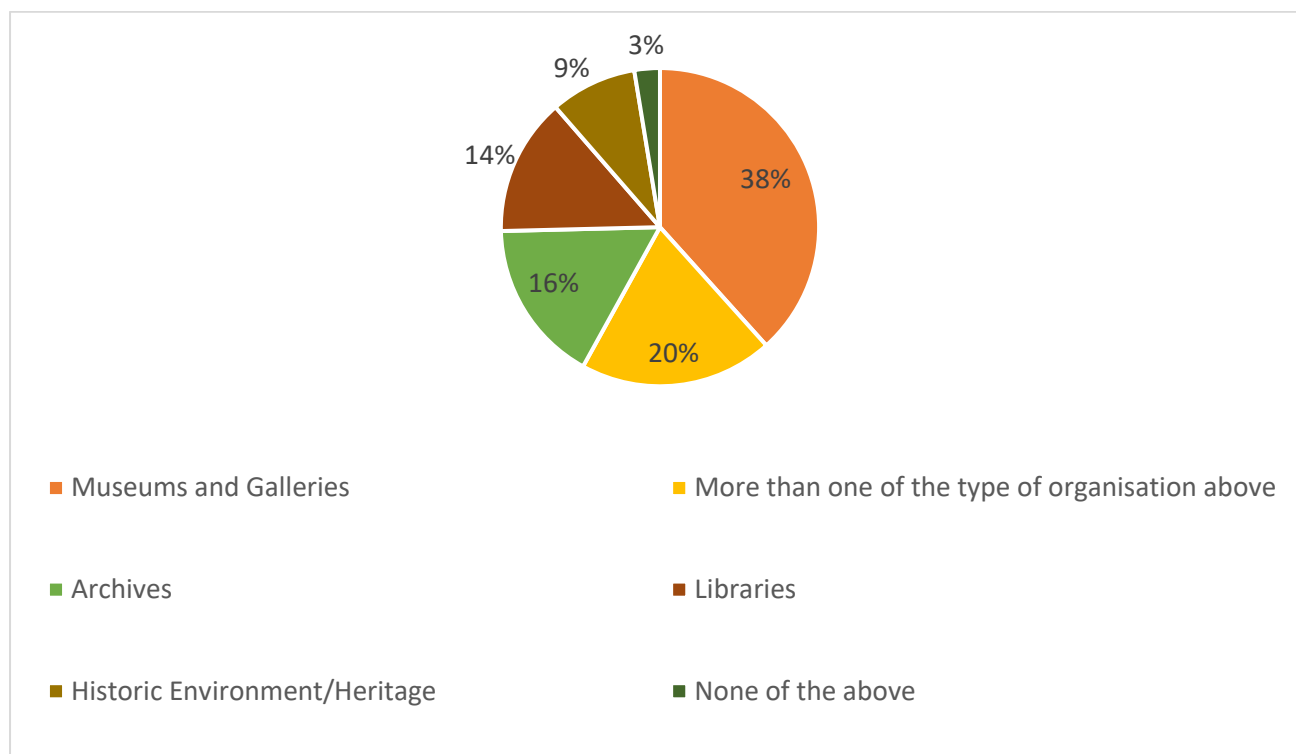
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middlesbrough Institutes of Modern Art</li> <li>• National Museums Liverpool</li> <li>• Van Abbemuseum</li> <li>• Wellcome Collection</li> </ul>	
The Sloane Lab: Looking Back to Build Future Shared Collections	October 2021- Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University College London</li> <li>• TU Darmstadt</li> <li>• British Museum</li> <li>• Natural History Museum</li> <li>• British Library</li> <li>• Historic Environment Scotland</li> <li>• Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh</li> <li>• National Museums of Scotland</li> <li>• Community Archives and Heritage Group</li> <li>• Down County Museum</li> <li>• National Galleries of Scotland</li> <li>• Oxford University Herbaria</li> <li>• Collecting the West project funded by the Australian Research Council &amp; metaphacts</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Sloane Lab – Looking back to build future shared collections</a>
Unpath'd Waters: Marine and Maritime Collections in the UK	November 2021- Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic England/English Heritage</li> <li>• Historic Environment Scotland</li> <li>• Museum of London Archaeology</li> <li>• National Maritime Museum</li> <li>• Universities of Bangor, Bradford, Portsmouth, St Andrews, Southampton, Ulster, York</li> <li>• Glasgow School of Art</li> <li>• National Oceanography Centre</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Unpath'd Waters</a>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mary Rose Trust</li><li>• Maritime Archaeology Trust</li><li>• Nautical Archaeology Society</li><li>• Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales</li><li>• Wessex Archaeology</li><li>• Welsh Government Historic Environment Service</li><li>• Department for Communities Northern Ireland</li><li>• Lloyd's Register Foundation</li><li>• Manx National Heritage</li><li>• Marine Management Organisation</li><li>• Protected Wreck Association</li></ul>	
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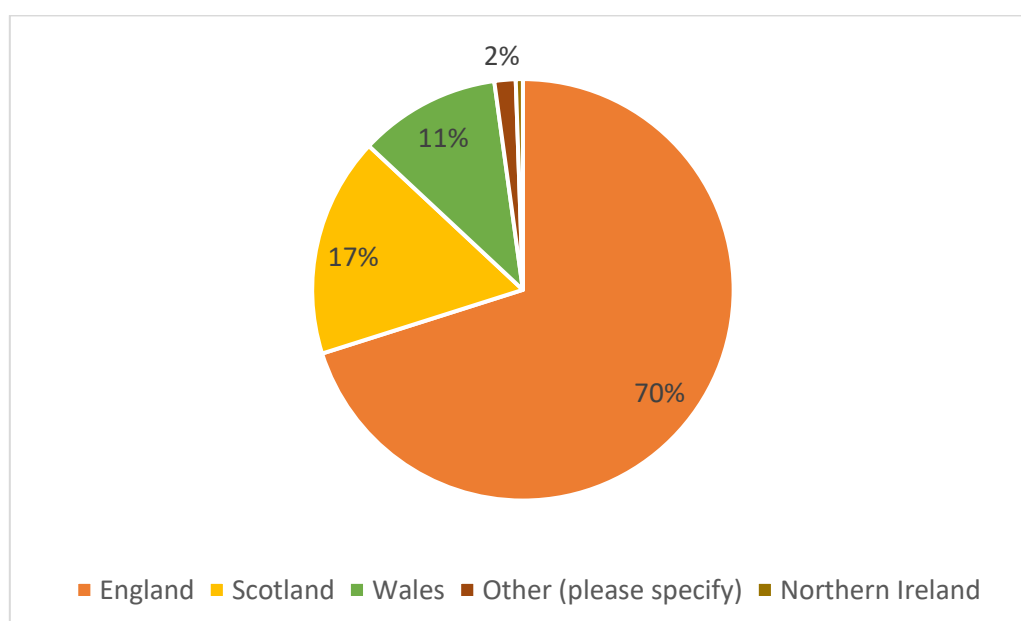


## Appendix E: Research participants- Survey respondents

Which of the following best describes your sector? n=193

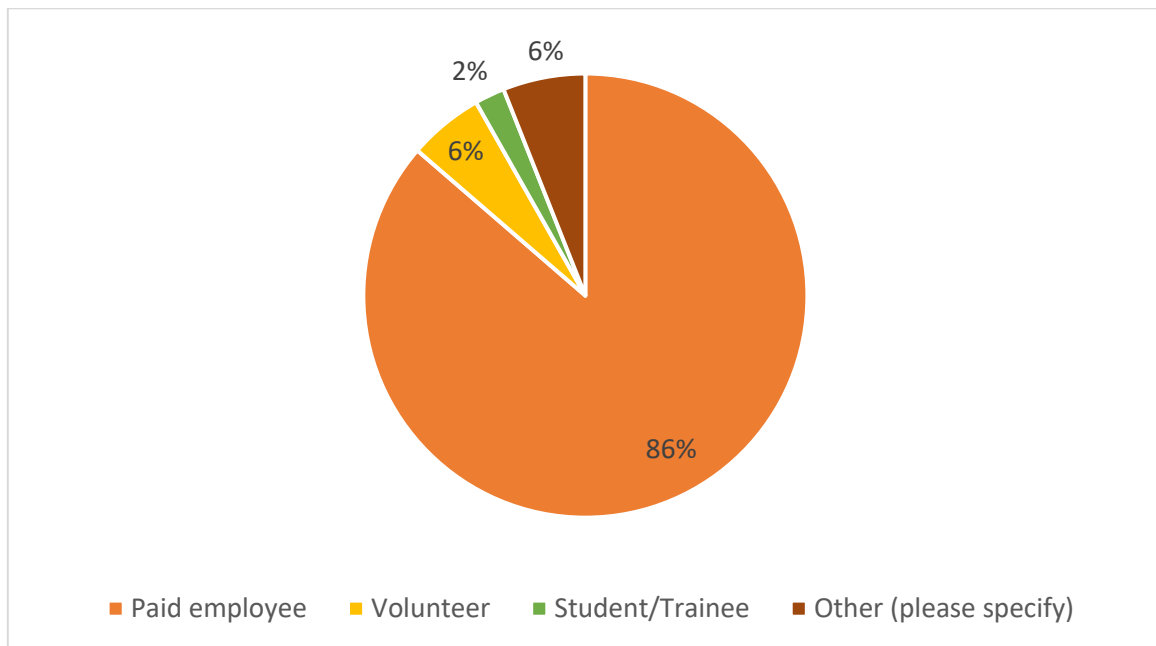


Where is your organisation based? n=184



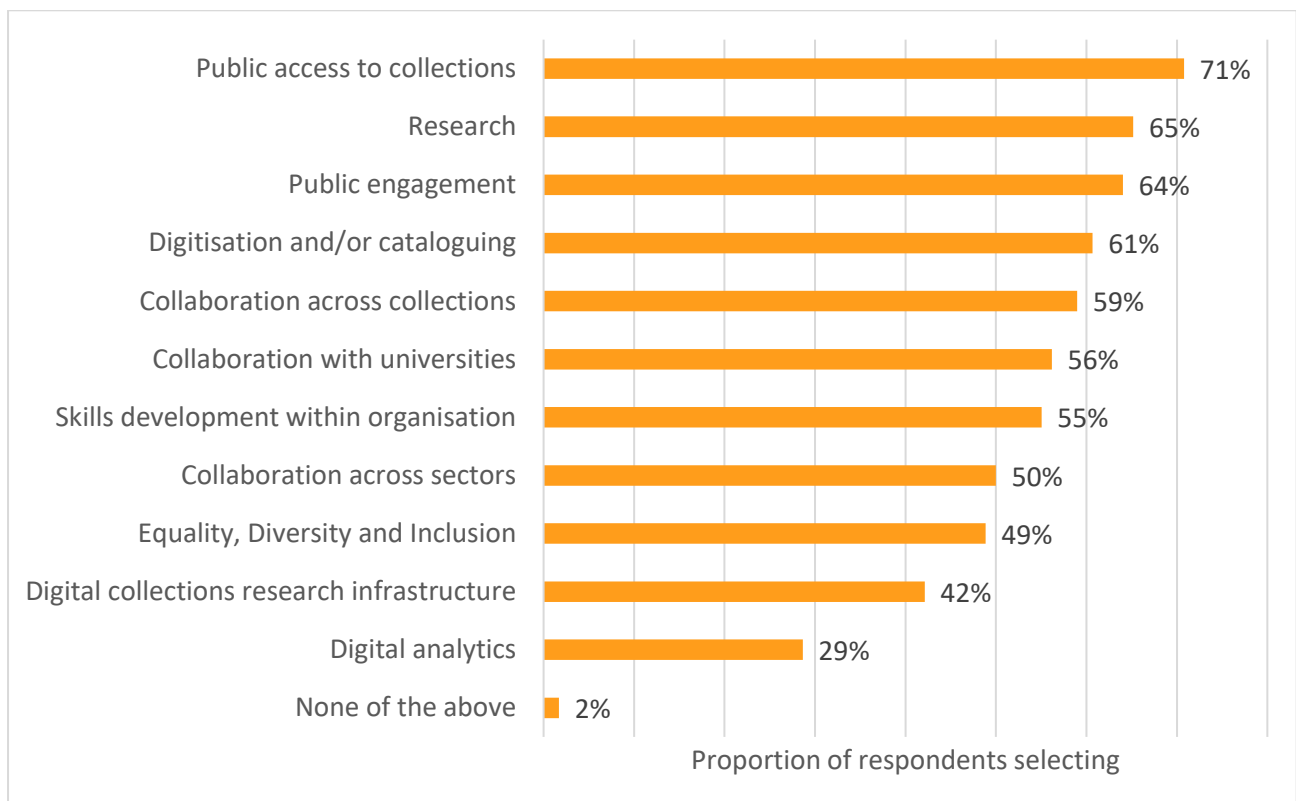
Other included- 2 explaining UK wide with offices in different countries, 1 person whose organisation based in United States (excluded from sample)

**Which of the following best describes your role? n=183**



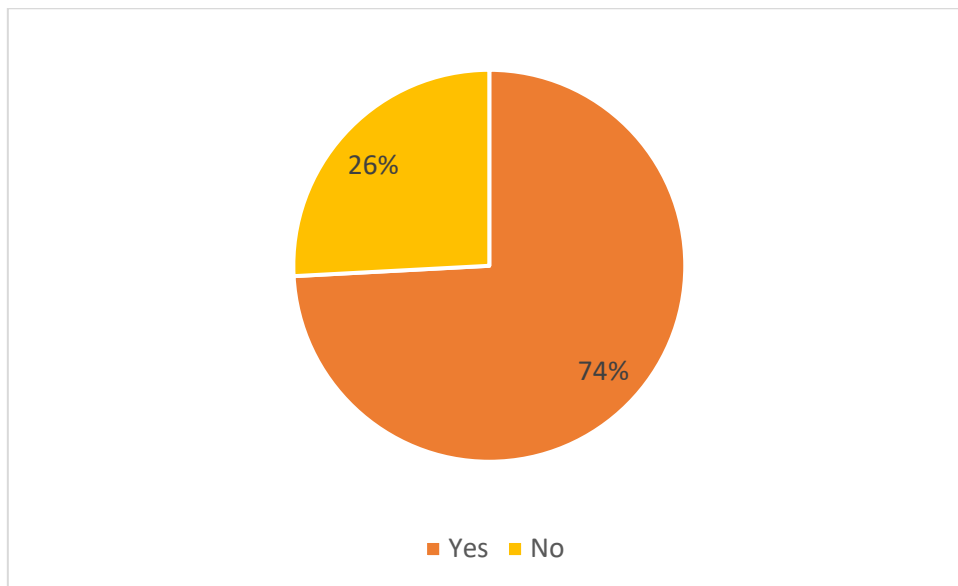
Other included 2 who specified they were volunteer trustees, 6 freelance consultants, 1 owner of a historic environment property

**Does your role involve any of the following? Please tick all that apply to you n=178**

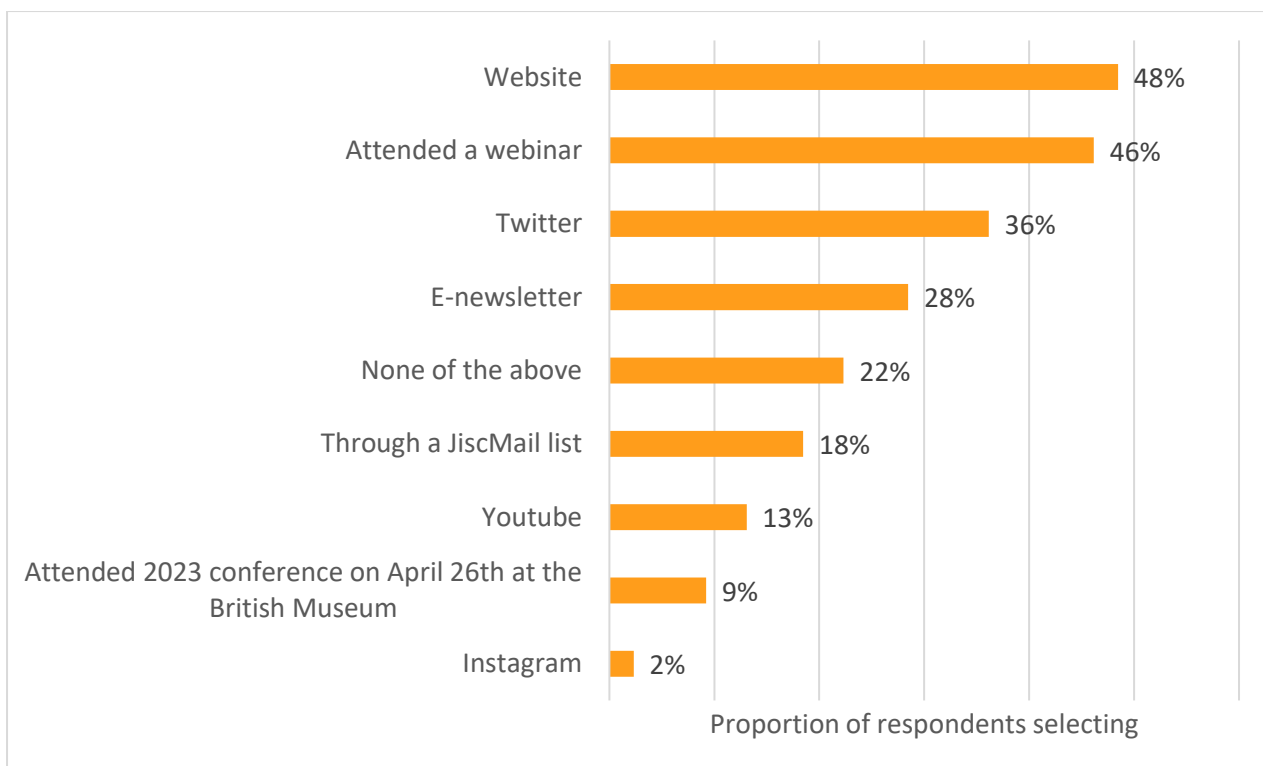


3 people added that they had been involved in unsuccessful bids for TaNC projects and one specified they had been to an online event organised by one of the TaNC projects.

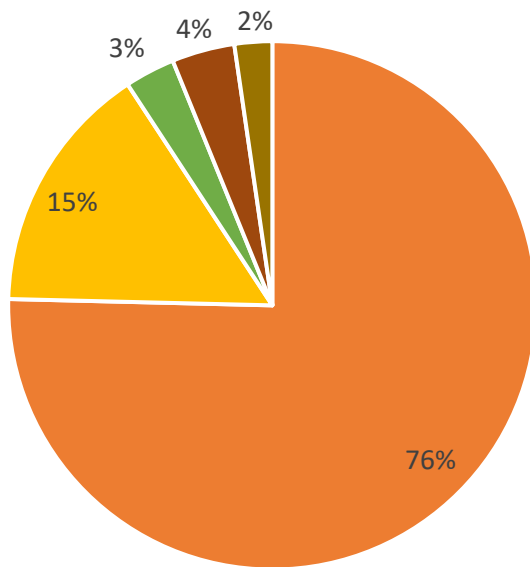
**Before taking this survey, had you heard of Towards a National Collection? n=178**



**Have you interacted with Towards a National Collection through any of the following? Please tick all that apply to you. n=130**



**Are you involved with Towards a National Collection? n=130**



- No, I am not directly involved in the programme
- Yes, involved in one Towards a National Collection project
- Yes, involved in multiple Towards a National Collection projects
- Yes, involved at the programme level and within at least one Towards a National Collection project
- Yes, involved at the overall programme level

## Appendix F: Sector Survey

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Wider GLAM sector - Questionnaire 1 of 2

v. 15 June 2023

### Introduction

If you are an employee, volunteer, or student in the UK's Galleries Libraries Archives and Museums sector, we invite you to complete this survey. Your feedback is important for shaping the future of UK collections infrastructure and building a case for its future funding.

Historic Environment Scotland has commissioned independent researchers, Diffley Partnership, to conduct an evaluation of the Towards a National Collection (TaNC) programme. This programme takes place from 2020 to 2025 and includes sixteen research projects. More information on this programme can be found [here](#).

This survey asks about your familiarity with and thoughts on the Towards a National Collection programme. It also gives you the opportunity to share your views on the needs and future direction of the Galleries Libraries Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector. Survey results will be important for influencing future support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the GLAM sector.

We would be grateful if you could complete this short survey even if you are not familiar with Towards a National Collection (TaNC).

The survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Your response is entirely confidential and will not be seen outside of the Diffley Partnership research team. After the survey closes, Diffley Partnership will analyse findings and report overall trends back to Historic Environment Scotland. Our reporting will not identify any respondents. For our full privacy notice please visit this webpage.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Diffley Partnership at [surveys@diffleypartnership.co.uk](mailto:surveys@diffleypartnership.co.uk)

Thank you in advance for your time and input.

## About your role and organisation

Firstly, we ask a few questions about your work. These will help with our analysis and will not be used to identify you in reporting.

Q1.

ASK ALL

MANDATORY

SELECT ONE

Which of the following best describes your sector?

- Libraries
- Archives
- Museums and Galleries
- Historic Environment/Heritage
- More than one of the type of organisation above
- None of the above [IF YES TO JUST THIS ONE, EXCLUDE FROM SURVEY]

Q2.

ASK ALL

MANDATORY

SELECT ONE

Which of the following best describes your role?

- Paid employee
- Volunteer
- Student/Trainee

Q3.

ASK ALL

MANDATORY

SELECT ALL

Does your role involve any of the following? Please tick all that apply to you

- [RANDOMISE ORDER]
- Digitisation and/or cataloguing
- Research
- Public access to collections
- Public engagement
- Skills development within organisation
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Collaboration across collections

- Collaboration across sectors
- Collaboration with universities
- Digital collections research infrastructure
- Digital analytics
- None of the above
- Other – please describe

## Familiarity with Towards a National Collection

The next few questions are about your interaction with the Towards a National Collection programme, please complete even if this survey is the first time you have heard of this programme.

Q4.

ASK ALL

MANDATORY

SELECT ONE

Before taking this survey, had you heard of Towards a National Collection?

- Yes
- No

IF Q4 = YES

Q5.

MANDATORY

SELECT ALL

Have you interacted with the Towards a National Collection through any of the following? Please tick all that apply to you.

[RANDOMISE ORDER]

- Twitter
- Youtube
- Instagram
- Attended 2023 conference on April 26<sup>th</sup> at the British Museum
- Through a JiscMail list
- E-newsletter
- Website
- Attended a webinar
- None of the above
- Other – please describe

IF Q4 = YES

Q6.

ASK ALL

MANDATORY

SELECT ONE

Are you involved with Towards a National Collection?

- Yes, involved at the programme level and within at least one Towards a National Collection project
- Yes, involved at the overall programme level
- Yes, involved in multiple Towards a National Collection projects
- Yes, involved in one Towards a National Collection project
- No, I am not directly involved in the programme

IF Q6= YES options

## Experience of Towards a National Collection

The next few questions are about your experience of the Towards a National Collection programme (TaNC).

Q.7

MANDATORY

Do you agree or disagree that TaNC has resulted in the following?:

- Helped our organisation improve our digital policy and strategy
- Helped our organisation improve our digital capacity and capability
- Helped us improve digital search of collections records
- Helped us develop collaborations with other organisations
- Helped us improve working across different disciplines
- Helped us develop partnerships with the higher education sector
- Helped skills development within our organisation
- Helped us engage with public audiences
- Helped us be innovative

SCALE: Strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, strongly disagree, don't know

Q.8

OPEN TEXT

Is there anything else you suggest in order for TaNC to maximise its impact on your organisation or the wider sector? (for example training, resources, knowledge sharing)



## UK GLAM Sector and Digital Collections Developments

The last few questions ask about your views on the UK's Galleries Libraries Archives Museums and heritage sector, sometimes referred to as GLAMs.

Q.9

ASK ALL

How important do you consider the following for the UK's GLAM sector?

- Dissolving barriers between collections
- Extending researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location
- Active and of benefit across the UK
- Opening up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research
- Benefiting a diverse range of audiences
- Providing clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward

SCALE: very important, slightly important, slightly unimportant, very unimportant, don't know

Q.10

ASK ALL

Would you agree or disagree that Towards a National Collection is achieving the following objectives?

- Dissolving barriers between collections
- Extending researcher and public access beyond the physical boundaries of their location
- Active and of benefit across the UK
- Opening up collections to new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection lines of research
- Benefiting a diverse range of audiences
- Providing clear evidence and exemplars that support enhanced funding going forward

SCALE: Strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, strongly disagree, don't know

Q.11

ASK ALL

What are your priorities for future investment? Please rank the following (where 1 is most important and 4 is least important):

RANDOMISE ORDER

- Increased digitisation
- Training and support for digital skills development
- A source of technical development and expertise
- Guidance on copyright, licensing and open access

SCALE:1,2,3,4

Q.12

ASK ALL

What do you want a future digital infrastructure to do for the sector? (where 1 is most important and 4 is least important):

RANDOMISE ORDER

- Connect and cross-search data from different institutions
- Enable citizen science such as crowdsourcing research
- Open multiple collections to current computational research tools
- Support the decolonisation of collections

SCALE:1,2,3,4