

An Evidence-based Culture for Documentary Heritage Collections

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January 2018

This report is the output of a study conducted by Ms Nancy Bell, formerly Head of Collection Care, The National Archives. It was funded by The National Archives and supported by the iSchool, Dept. of Computer and Information Sciences at Northumbria University from June 2016 to September 2017.

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Executive Summary

Context

This report considers how those responsible for documentary heritage¹ collections held in archives and libraries in the UK can build a more sustainable future in the face of economic, social and technological changes. The expansion of digital access to such collections, by an ever more diverse community of users, blurs the boundaries between collections and user interfaces, calling into question the whole notion of 'a collection' as an intrinsically valuable physical asset.

Economic factors include the ongoing reductions in central, higher education and, significantly, local authority spending, which for many local councils will entail the loss of more than 60 per cent of income by 2020.² Further retrenchment of already pinched resources is inevitable; funding will be focused on the delivery of essential front-line services that can be shown to have value and be valued by the public.

Recently published statistics suggest further impact on the documentary heritage sector. The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) *Taking Part* survey reports a decline of 3 per cent over the last two years of on-site visitors to archives, largely 65-74 year olds³. A similar downward trend in accessing archive or record office websites is also reported, while library access is static. This downward trend is expected to continue as more content is available online and available through a greater number of portals.⁴ Academic services and privately held collections have also witnessed a decline in staffing and 'efficiencies', gained through mergers with other collection services.

Understanding the value of documentary heritage

To address these challenges The National Archives and Northumbria University's iSchool jointly supported a project to address three interrelated aims. The study was designed to:

- provide a narrative as a context for building resilience and therefore a more sustainable future in an increasing networked society;
- offer recommendations to advance the way in which evidence is gathered and used to demonstrate the value of documentary heritage collections; and
- highlight the professional culture and political relationships needed to develop an evidence-based culture for the sector.

The starting-point was to understand how different stakeholders and communities value documentary heritage and the services they offer, and how these valuations align with the contemporary debate in the UK about the value of culture and heritage experience. This long-standing debate has in recent decades informed policy programmes intended to demonstrate a return on public investment, support and shape key policy objectives, and make the case for funding. This approach continues today, as evidenced by the Culture White Paper, which makes explicit the social benefits of cultural participation in terms of health, education and community cohesion.⁵

Project methods and approach

The huge canon of published literature over the last 30 years was reviewed, with a focus on UK government-commissioned and think-tank reports, as well as academic papers. The views of experienced professionals were sought as a means of gaining insight through an array of disciplinary perspectives such as history, public policy, computing science and cultural diplomacy.

This report offers a synthesis of the key determinants of value for documentary heritage as presented in the published literature, recognising that most studies are focused on cultural and performing arts or museums, whose missions differ significantly from those of archives and libraries, and which provide distinctly different kinds of engagement.

Compelling evidence

There is no magic bullet or quick fix for the challenges of sustainability, although advocacy to funders, policymakers and the public based on compelling evidence is a key component of the response by the sector. Current evidence includes data on documentary heritage services, largely performance data as to the number of on-site and online visitors, numbers of records catalogued and customers served. This is rigorously captured and reported through central agencies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Public Sector Quality Research Group (PSQRG) as well as a number of professional bodies. While data of this kind can explain how well a service performs, it falls short of explaining the impact, or the difference the services make to people's lives. A shift in the type of data collected is required.

The documentary heritage sector is well placed to leverage the evidence it currently captures and mine new seams, such as stakeholder views and cross-disciplinary research outcomes. The *Impact Evaluation of Museums, Archives, and Libraries: Available Evidence Project* retrospectively evaluated the evidence needed to demonstrate social, economic and learning impact, and recommended 'encouraging professionals to be more aware of, and committed to, evidenced-based practice', yet little progress has been made in this area since its publication in 2002⁶.

Meanings and misconceptions

The language surrounding 'value' is complex and subject to considerable variation in meaning. To clarify how terms are used in this report, definitions are presented in an extended glossary drawing on the vocabulary of a wider cultural values lexicon.

Key findings

- ***Capturing benefits***

This study found many examples of the value of documentary heritage services both to primary users who use and experience collections first hand, and to a much wider group of secondary users who benefit from the services provided by archives and libraries. The contribution these services make to the UK economy and to wider society may be significant, but evidence for their benefits and the impact derived has yet to be fully evaluated.

- ***Communicating the value, benefits and impact***

The documentary heritage sector falls woefully short in communicating to critical stakeholders the value it adds socially, economically or academically and the impact of this longer term. If there is to be a chance of a sustainable future in the face of ongoing reductions in budgets and other technological change, the sector needs to get better at this.

- ***Measures and metrics***

While a single measure for demonstrating the value of documentary heritage collections would be desirable, this is unlikely to emerge, given that evaluation techniques are designed to address specific questions. It is widely agreed that metrics alone inadequately capture the value of culture, cultural experience and services; more nuanced measures are required. Evaluating what is achieved (both outcomes and outputs) is considered as important as the performance of services. Measuring outcomes and outputs is increasingly a requirement of funders, and is made explicit in the 2016 DCMS Culture White Paper.⁷

While all metrics and measures designed to evaluate cultural value are to a degree subjective, they can be effectively applied in some contexts. For example, measures to evaluate the number of books published, emerging documentary heritage collections, content licensing contracts, and social benefits to communities, for example, could usefully contribute to a broad evidence base if captured systematically.

- ***A compelling evidence base***

Data collection and evaluation is just one strand of a larger bundle of evidence very much needed by the sector. Discussions with Chief Executives of services and professional bodies, local authority experts and a government Minister, confirmed that defending documentary heritage services against other statutory obligations such as social services is difficult and will continue to be so. A 'backpack' full of stories, statistics, evaluations that can be used with authority and conviction, is required if advocacy is to be successful.

- ***Further research and evaluation***

The documentary heritage sector is notably absent from the substantial corpus of government-funded think-tank research and evaluation studies undertaken over the last 30 years in the UK, and it therefore has not been subject to the same rigorous evaluation as other cultural organisations. Its 'value' and the long-term benefits to the communities it serves, and the impact it delivers longer term, have yet to be fully explained. There is an opportunity to redress this imbalance by lobbying funders for further research in this domain.

Next steps: A strategic approach

Foster the right culture

The defence of the sector depends crucially on commonly agreed objectives, strong leadership, compelling evidence and a willingness to embrace change. This report makes clear these desiderata are a long way off, but if action is not taken, the sector can expect dwindling resources and a continued decline in users. The days of strictly held divisions between archives and libraries are over, given that archives, libraries and local history services are all facing the same pressure of reduced budgets and the shifting expectations of users for ever more digital provision. All the focus groups and discussions conducted in relation to this project confirm there is a genuine grassroots thirst for change and a need for a policy direction to demonstrate the impact of these valuable services.

There are already some clear ways forward. In recent years the National Archives has stepped-up its sector lead in England, and the recently published Government sponsored, *Archives Unlocked*,⁸ sets out an ambitious programme to build resilience for the sector and includes as a key objective demonstrating the impact of services through better data collection and evaluation. The TNA/RLUK annual conference and a determination to improve leadership in the university library sector are other examples of change. However, these fall short of an unambiguous single voice for the documentary heritage sector as a whole, which is required to engage with important work in this area within DCMS.

Recommendation: Establish a cross-sector task force

It is recommended as a first step that a cross-sector independent task force should be set up, to include national, local, professional, government and academic experts to co-create and co-deliver a strategic plan to develop an evidence-based culture for the documentary heritage sector, building on existing cross-sector activity, other evaluation studies taking place and the anticipated momentum ignited by this report.

The priority actions for the Task Force should include:

1. Upgrading skills and knowledge

Prioritise skilling up professionals in the documentary heritage sector to help them develop an evidence-based culture, including understanding the metrics, tools, and impact models available. They see the importance of using evidence to demonstrate the value of their services, but often feel too ill-equipped and time-strapped to mine the range of information necessary to make a case. This requires collaboration with professional bodies such as the Archives and Records Association, lead organisations such as The National Archives and Research Libraries UK, The National Records of Scotland, National Library of Wales, The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, as well as regional bodies, academic experts, grant-giving bodies and funders.

2. Capturing data and using tools

- Support development of cross-sector standards for data-capture for the documentary heritage sector, in collaboration with allied initiatives already underway, for example, AHRC's Cultural Values project, the Library Task Force and the DCMS Evidence Unit.
- Understand how users would evaluate different kinds of information and the services they need to build an evidence-based culture.
- Evaluate the usefulness of guidance and toolkits designed for evaluation and capturing impact.
- Pilot existing technologies already used by the museum sector designed to capture stakeholder experiences.
- Develop evidence-based resources through an online portal to share evaluations and disseminate research in this area.

3. Addressing Research Gaps

Identify the research and evaluation studies required to capture better the value added by documentary heritage services, and to track the impact of services to government, the public and researchers. The key findings of this project could usefully be taken forward as the basis of a national research strategy to define the evaluation research for documentary heritage collections that is needed.

Develop a shared research strategy and undertake advocacy on behalf of the sector to research funders to secure funds for the evaluation of the long-term impact of the documentary heritage sector.

References

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Contents

Introduction	2
Methods and approach.....	2
Meanings and misconceptions	3
Context.....	4
I. The Big Picture: Learning from the Past, Cultural Value Then and Now	4
The current position: evidencing outcomes and impact	6
II. Towards a credible evidence base: Capturing Value	7
Capturing Economic Value	7
Capturing Social Value	8
Capturing Public Value.....	9
Capturing Stakeholder Views.....	9
III. Towards a Credible Evidence Base: What is Evidence, why we need it and how can it be developed?.....	10
Narratives and Case-studies	15
IV. Value to Impact.....	15
Demonstrating Economic Value and Impact	16
Demonstrating Public Value	17
Demonstrating Social Value.....	17
V. Capturing the numbers: toolkits, models, frameworks.....	18
VI. Do we have the right professional and political skills to influence and demonstrate the value and impact of our sector?.....	18
VII. Summary: Conclusions and Next Steps	19
Conclusions	19
Next steps: a strategic approach	19
Recommendation: Establish a cross-sector task force	19
Acknowledgements.....	23
Appendix 1. Terms and Definitions.....	24
Appendix 2. Metrics and their application.....	26
Bibliography	27

Introduction

The overarching aim of this project was to consider how documentary heritage¹ collections held in archives and libraries in the UK can build a more sustainable future in an increasingly networked society. New issues arise from the ongoing expansion of digital access to such collections by an ever more diverse community of users. As the boundaries between collections and user interfaces become blurred, the whole notion of 'a collection' as an intrinsically valuable physical asset, a place of learning or of memory, or 'the embodiment of the academy' is called into question. What are the implications of these changes for a sustainable future?

The starting-point of the project was to understand how different stakeholders and communities, for example, funders, policy-makers and the public, value our documentary heritage and services, and how these perceptions fit within the contemporary debate about the value of cultural experience. Of particular interest to this study is the complex relationship that has emerged in the UK between culture, heritage and government: successive Governments have realigned the relationship of culture and heritage to supporting public policy agendas. Some three decades ago, this perennial debate gained momentum from renewed government interest in 'valuing' heritage and culture, and it continues with vigour today. The drivers for this initiative formed part of a broader policy programme that aimed to demonstrate a return on public investment, support and shape key policy objectives, and make the case for funding.

Over the intervening years, there have been many government-supported attempts to understand and measure the value of culture and cultural heritage to society; to explore what is valued and why, and critically, to develop appropriate metrics and mechanisms for capturing the economic and social benefits of culture offered by collecting institutions. Even a cursory appraisal of three decades of theoretical literature, reports from think-tanks and government policy papers identifies some 600 published research papers focused on culture and cultural heritage valuation: this is in addition to ongoing empirical research currently underway. Yet despite the attention the subject has received, documentary heritage is largely absent from the narrative and digital heritage even more so, a point considered later in this report.

How we value our culture and heritage is a complex question that in one way or another threads through much of our day-to-day life. Whether it is a Minister charged with understanding the costs and benefits of a policy initiative, local authority councillors balancing the conflicting demands of public services or indeed schoolchildren engaging with collections in their local history centres, in each case 'value' is experienced and implicitly assessed through a variety of lenses: economic, social, intellectual, aesthetic and, of course, emotional.

The breadth and depth of debate around this subject is an indication of the complexity of the seemingly simple word 'value' and the challenge of identifying, capturing and translating into practice the benefits derived from collections and the services they offer. This study seeks to inform thinking on how these collections can develop an impactful and therefore a sustainable future.

Methods and approach

An initial review was undertaken of the huge canon of published literature over the last thirty years with a focus on UK Government-commissioned and think-tank reports, as well as academic theoretical papers. It is not within the scope of this project to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the literature. Rather, the aim has been to develop a narrative around this subject in order to identify the trends emerging over the last three decades of vigorous debate in the UK.

In addition to the literature review, conversations with experienced professionals were sought as a means of gaining insight into this vast subject through an array of disciplinary perspectives: history, public policy, computing science and cultural diplomacy, to list but a few. In addition, extensive discussions in the form of semi-structured interviews were carried out with archivists, librarians, information specialists and in particular, those at the centre of public inquiries past and present in the UK and Ireland. Public inquiries bring to the fore the complexity of capturing, preserving and making accessible information that may well become judicial evidence, further underlined in the recent Grenfell Tower fire currently under investigation. They can also highlight a misalignment between collecting/appraisal practice and the public's expectation that statutory bodies will be accountable and transparent. Archives offer a unique insight into a possible aspect of 'public value' as a responsibility of archives, and so were given additional attention.

A second strand considered how established evaluation models and existing methodologies could usefully be applied as one of many evidential building blocks necessary for funders, the public and institutions themselves. Whether in the public sector, higher education or collecting institutions, credible evidence is increasingly necessary to understanding what works and what doesn't. It is essential for advocacy, influencing policy and underpinning budget decisions. Yet despite the attention this subject has received in a wide range of disciplines, there is limited understanding within collecting institutions of how to capture evidence consistently and use it to influence policy or improve practice.

Lastly, it was important to consider how the outcomes of this study could usefully translate into practice. An additional question therefore needed to be addressed: does the sector have well-developed political and professional systems to influence and drive an impact agenda?

Based on these strands of inquiry, this review offers a synthesis of the key determinants of value for documentary heritage as presented in the published literature, recognising that most studies are focused on cultural and performing arts or museums, whose missions differ significantly from those of archives and libraries, and which provide distinctly different kinds of engagement.

The aims of this review are to:

- provide a narrative as a context for building resilience and therefore a sustainable future in an increasing networked society;
- offer recommendations to advance the way in which evidence is gathered and used to demonstrate the value of documentary heritage collections; and
- highlight the professional, cultural and political relationships needed to develop an evidence-based culture for the sector.

Meanings and misconceptions

From the outset of this project, it was clear that since the language surrounding 'value' is complex and subject to considerable variation in meaning, a linguistic brick wall is soon encountered in embarking on any study in this area. There is no reliable consensus as to precise definitions of commonly used terms and meaning, thus consistent, accurate interpretations of some of the literature has proved difficult. I have made an attempt to untangle this linguistic web, and to clarify how terms are used in this report, definitions are presented in an extended glossary drawing on the vocabulary of a wider cultural values lexicon. (**Appendix 1**)

Context

It is not surprising that terms such as ‘measuring cultural value’ or ‘evaluation and impact assessments’ can elicit a range of responses from indifference to extreme ire. After all, how can one capture, measure, and calculate the experience of an amazing book, reading one’s grandfather’s war diary, or the excitement of a new digital tool connecting data from hitherto unknown sources? The subjective responses that connect us to the past or possible futures run counter, or so it seems, to any notion that these experiences can be evaluated or measured. Yet for professionals working in higher education, or those based in both publicly funded and private collections, today’s prevailing ‘audit culture’ of ‘institutionalized expectations and instruments’² is pervasive across many industries including the documentary heritage sector.

If the sector is to have a sustainable future, we need to get better at demonstrating the value, benefits and impact our services provide, in delivering improved educational attainment or a greater sense of well-being, for example; and explaining the contribution they make to the growth of the economy, through job creation, or, importantly, nurturing creativity. This is particularly true in locally held collections, with local authorities comprising a significant funding source for documentary heritage collections and arguably the one most closely attuned to local need. This review explores how this might be achieved.

I. The Big Picture: Learning from the Past, Cultural Value Then and Now

To situate this analysis, it is useful to understand the place of documentary heritage value within a wider context of evolving ‘cultural value’ studies in the UK. A review of the literature demonstrates a complex interrelationship between cultural institutions, government and funding bodies, and our understanding of the public value of cultural assets and heritage. The benefits of arts and cultural heritage to society have been asserted for centuries, both as a means of individual refinement and as a catalyst for social improvement. The arguments are well-established and this remains an active area of academic research, although a more nuanced narrative exploring ‘how’ and ‘why’ we benefit from cultural experience has gained ground in recent years and is the focus of many studies.³

The intention here is to highlight the ongoing debate in the UK, and to underline the point that every Government, at least in the last 30 years, has defined and redefined the role of culture and cultural heritage to meet policy objectives. In the post-war years, the Wilson Government aimed to re-balance a perceived elitist view of arts and culture that had prevailed for generations. A more democratic approach sought to promote national culture as a mechanism for social improvement: ‘... access should be central to everyone’s experience, and embedded in the educational system.’ This explicit departure was set out in Jennie Lee’s 1965 White Paper *A policy for the Arts*,⁴ the first of its kind, its view contrasting with, for example, the Thatcher Government’s largely instrumentalist position questioning why the public should fund culture at all. Instrumental approaches proved a highly contentious, robustly debated amongst professionals, which arguably proved significant in creating a new industry of methodological research and evaluation of cultural values that is still active today.

The relationship between policy and cultural funding evolved further under the Labour party, subsequently referred to as ‘New Labour’ after their election in 1997, with their commitment to taking forward the Modernising Government agenda for overall cost reduction. The emphasis was on governments ensuring that publicly funded bodies demonstrated value for money and a return on public investment, so-called “deliverology”. Once again, the value of culture and cultural heritage was reappraised. It comes as little surprise, given that the Blair Government was a principal

stakeholder, that what emerged was a concept of value designed to meet its key policy objectives in establishing a more equitable society. Culture was seen as a catalyst for change, with an explicit role in delivering social policy.

This policy agenda had a very clear voice of support. The then Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, actively took up the 'policy to practice' baton in 1997, campaigning for museums, archives and libraries to play a central role in delivering the Government's social inclusion policy agenda. For example, his *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Libraries, and Archives for All* (2000) set out a policy:

*'To promote the involvement in culture and leisure activities of those at risk of social disadvantage or marginalisation, particularly by virtue of the area they live in; their disability, poverty, age, racial or ethnic origin. To improve the quality of people's lives by these means...'*⁵

This was soon followed by a series of specific policies set out in, for example, *Libraries for All: Social Inclusion in Public Libraries*, and *A Standard for Access to Archives* produced by the Public Services Quality Group (the Quality Forum for Archives and Local Studies). This focused on the Government's policy on archives and was in part a response to the Modernising Government initiative, along with the DCMS: Resource-funded *Developing the 21st Century Archive: An Action Plan for United Kingdom Archives*.⁶

While the dialogue between the culture sector and government sought to define the value of investing in culture, it was soon recognised that instrumental measures of outcomes alone only told part of the story, and other forms of value needed to be considered.⁷ Many authors have debated this subject over the intervening years. More recently Walmsley neatly concluded: '...at the heart of the debate lies a seemingly intractable body of knowledge, where qualitative insights are generally subordinated to quantitative data, which are widely deemed to constitute the only sufficient "evidence" to measure the policy impact (or cost benefit) of cultural activity.'⁸ The qualitative benefits were notably argued by Scott, who warned that when public funding decisions rely on measurable results rather than vulnerable outcomes, cultural policy risks falling back into the 'bind of instrumentality.'⁹

Against this background, John Holden's seminal work *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy* proposed a value triangle to illustrate the relationship between intrinsic, institutional and instrumental values, as a consolidation of three modes from the perspective of stakeholders: government, cultural institutions and the public. He defined concepts of value as:

- *intrinsic values* as the subjective experiences that can't be measured but must be captured in personal testimony, qualitative assessment, anecdotes, case studies and critical reviews;
- *instrumental values* as encompassing economic and social value: 'culture used to achieve a social and economic purpose.' These are associated with impacts, outcomes and benefits;
- *institutional value* as the organisational processes that create value for the public, for example trust and mutual respect as a basis for 'sociability and the enjoyment of shared experiences'.¹⁰

He argues that governments champion a form of value that aligns with policy objectives. For example, public value captures the value to society; public institutions offer value through, for example, educational programming; and users gain value through subjective measures, for example by experiencing culture intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually'.¹¹ It is the finer filter that Holden posits - understanding what is valued, to whom and why - that offers much to this study.

Using evidence to underpin policy was a hallmark of New Labour and since this period a significant number of Arts Council and local government commissioned reports have emerged, together with a considerable body of theoretical literature, toolkits and guidance, all designed to evaluate and capture cultural value.¹²

Yet despite this background of intense research and development, archives and libraries have been notably absent from the discourse on the use of collections and services to provide evidence for public policy and advocate for funding. The reasons for this are various. While archives and libraries, like museums, have long-established traditions of collecting and delivering learning programmes, and are well-established within the fabric of society, there are differences. Museum engagement is experiential: visitors are offered an interpretation of collections and engage directly with the works on display, whereas the emotional, spiritual or intellectual response elicited by archives and libraries usually requires an indirect engagement through reading.

There is also another significant difference in that different funding regimes have created silos across the sectors. Unlike museums, which comprise a larger sector, a number of which are funded directly by central and devolved government, or by private or academic bodies, most archives and libraries are funded locally and as a result historically have had less influence on national policy. Different funding arrangements are a contributing factor, giving rise to a fragmented network that hinders a single voice for the documentary heritage sector and makes the consistent application of standard evaluation techniques difficult.

Other imperatives are also at play. In the last eight to ten years, most publicly funded cultural institutions have had to robustly defend budgets against other services. Locally funded services have experienced a reduction of 37% and another substantial squeeze is predicted for the next five years. For many locally funded services, this would mean the loss of more than 60% of income by 2020,¹³ bringing the need for evidence-based advocacy to the fore as never before.

The current position: evidencing outcomes and impact

It is well-established that a range of both quantitative and qualitative methods is necessary to capture the value and benefits of experiencing culture and the services cultural institutions provide, and that these need to work in tandem. It is also recognised that a degree of subjectivity is associated with each method and there is no single way to express the value of services. The *Understanding the Value of Arts and Culture* project, sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), reflected this with its ambitious funding call in 2013 for work that might ‘...cumulatively establish a framework that will advance the way in which we talk about the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate value’,¹⁴ giving particular attention to the experience of culture. Unfortunately, heritage had only a marginal inclusion, and archives and library collections were largely absent from this project, nevertheless we can learn a great deal from the conclusions of this excellent study that persuasively argues the need for more nuanced measures of impact than is currently on offer if the real value of culture is to be fully understood.

What has emerged over the last thirty years is a greater emphasis on measuring the outcomes and the impact of services on the economy and society as a better capture than measuring outputs alone. The recently published Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) White Paper, *A Policy for the Arts in England* (2016) makes explicit the need for ‘evidence to show that participation can contribute to social relationships, community cohesion, and/or make communities feel safer and stronger.’¹⁵ How can this be achieved? Other models have also stressed the importance of blending evidence with judgement as part of a wider bundle of metrics and methods useful for capturing the value, benefits and impacts of publicly funded services.

II. Towards a credible evidence base: Capturing Value

To better understand the kind of evidence that has developed over the years in different contexts, what follows is a summary of the key metrics used in the cultural sector to capture value, the questions these measures seek to address, and importantly the outcome and output priorities that currently hold sway for government funding. Particular emphasis is placed on valuation methods that closely align with the priorities of stakeholders, notably central and local government funders, as just one potential offer to the documentary heritage sector. The list is indicative rather than exhaustive, as the aim is to provide a pointer to the range of tested quantitative and qualitative methods as well as new thinking. It is noteworthy that little has been published on methods used to value documentary heritage collections in the canon of academic research, or indeed the application of conceptual thinking to practice.

Capturing Economic Value

Economic valuation broadly seeks to capture the economic benefits derived from public institutions and from the return on public investment, and is sometimes used by central and local authority funders. Economic impact is usually measured in two distinct ways by analysing either direct or indirect benefits. Direct benefits include spending and employment as benefits to a local economy, or, for example, the direct monetary benefit to an institution from users of the collection. This is often framed in terms of return on investment (ROI).

There are other instances, when no money changes hands, so the value of the goods or services requires other types of evaluation such as asking people what they are willing to pay. Such 'stated preference techniques' including Willingness to Pay metrics, provide an alternative in the absence of significant quantitative data.¹⁶ Usually captured through surveys of users, this method is sometimes considered too subjective on the grounds that respondents often do not understand the full context of the questions.

Where some published economic evaluations of documentary heritage activities are reported, these are studies of the direct economic benefits of public libraries to local communities, say through shopping, dining and accommodation, with archive services largely absent from the literature. One notable exception however, by Yakel *et al*, reports on two parallel studies of state and locally funded archives undertaken in Canada and the USA in 2009 -2010 and the indirect economic value of archives to the local community. Their findings concluded that \$2.6 million was contributed by visitors in one year, equating to an average spend of \$50.00 spend locally per visitor. This figure is based on 1600 visitors to archives per week for those institutions included in the study.¹⁷ This is a modest figure and one largely based on extrapolated findings, but nevertheless a helpful contribution, given the dearth of aggregated data that can be considered as useful evidence. The absence of data that can be credibly aggregated to capture the value of the sector is a point the authors underline and will be returned to later in this report.

Willingness To Pay (WTP) metrics feature in the few published evaluation studies in the documentary heritage sector. For example, a British Library study measured the direct economic impact of British Library Services, using a consumer surplus methodology when data is not available. Contingent valuation data, such as 'willingness to pay' for library services is sometimes used in the absence of other data.¹⁸ Information was collected from reading room users, remote users and exhibition attendees. The study concluded that users and non-users were willing to pay more than they are in taxes and the indirect benefits, i.e. benefits to the local economy, generated 4.4 times its annual government funding, or £363m (£59m use value, £304m non-use value). Since this first study, Oxford Economics has reported (2013) that the British Library delivers an economic value of £5.00

for every £1.00 invested and generates a net value of £419m for its users and the UK economy as a whole.¹⁹

Building on the initial British Library study, Jura Consultants evaluated Bolton's museum, library and archive services against local authority investment in cultural institutions and reported that while the local authority spent £6.5 million, the public valued it at £10.4 million.²⁰ Stated preference techniques were used to elicit non-user benefits e.g. pride in having a local service, despite non-participation. Willingness To Pay is a proven method for capturing an economic value without money changing hands. While this kind of evidence makes for compelling headlines, there is a degree of scepticism about the conclusions, with one Government Minister stating, 'if this were a clear-cut case we should simply invest in more libraries'. A frequent criticism levied against return on investment evaluations is that the full operating costs of an organisation are not adequately represented in the assessment.

The report *Measuring the Value of Culture: A report to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport*, usefully presents a summary of evaluation tools across disciplines that have evolved and entered mainstream politics. The HM Treasury *Green Book* (2003) and *Magenta Book* (2011) argue that cost benefit analysis should be applied to policies, programmes and projects proportionately, where practicable to do so.²¹ While both the *Green* and *Magenta Book* emphasise economic valuation techniques, which can seem at odds with the cultural and heritage sectors, they do present a standards of good practice in conducting evaluations, and aims to provide an understanding of the issues faced when evaluating projects, policies, programmes and the delivery of services. They are useful guides for all policy-makers and analysts, including those in local government and the voluntary sector.

Other economic valuation techniques include for example:

- *Choice modelling*: this method does not directly value goods; it is used to value different options and choices.
- *Travel cost*: measures the economic value of a good or service based on willingness to pay for travel to the experience.

Capturing Social Value

Social value in the context of cultural values is defined as: 'the benefits to society that can be realised from engaging in culture'.²² Social value can be realised by institutions and individuals, and has been examined through several studies designed to investigate the social benefits of engaging with cultural experiences, for example improved literacy, improved health and sense of well-being. Research has found positive links between cultural participation and improved social skills and engagement with the wider community, as well as evidence that culture can play a role in tackling crime, yet while the evidence is promising it is insufficient at present. DCMS has published research critically reviewing the social impacts of culture and sport assessed through extensive longitudinal surveys and interviews. The CASE-sponsored *Review of the Social Impact of Culture and Sport* provides a full picture of the social impacts of culture and sport and is one of the few that includes archive and library collections.²³

Well-being valuation is a fairly recent addition to the social evaluation toolkit. It aims to evaluate a number of factors that contribute to subjective well-being e.g. change in income or improved health. In recent years, the *Taking Part* survey²⁴ has investigated the relationship of well-being and cultural engagement; though a firm causal link has yet to be made.²⁵ There is a significant body of literature reporting on this subject, well covered in the published academic sources and government-commissioned reports which aimed to understand the impact of policy intervention on well-being, most of which is focused on museums. Indeed, in the last 3 years around £2 million has been offered

by DCMS directed towards researching the relationship between well-being and museum experience.

For example, the newly established National Alliance for Museums and Health and Wellbeing sponsored by University College London and the Arts Council, acts as a clearing-house for well-being and cultural engagement research. The Alliance supports an excellent website that includes sections on evidence and outcome evaluation methods and published evaluation toolkits. There is now an annual conference on museum and health practice that aims to showcase this growing area of research, which could serve as a useful model for the documentary heritage sector.

In the context of documentary heritage, Fujiwara finds that, for example, library engagement showed an association between frequent library use and reported well-being. Using libraries was valued at £1359 per year for library users, or £113 per person per month.²⁶ Other more recent research projects such as 'Not So Grim Up North' is just one example of many, investigating the possible impact of visits to the Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Service on a range of mental health issues.²⁷

Capturing Public Value

Public value has been defined as a 'way of thinking about, articulating and (ideally) increasing the value of the services provided by public agencies' or organisations generally. Holden's notion of value has particular application for the library and archive sector. Holden is the scholar most associated with introducing the concept of public value to the sector.²⁸ Moore's pioneering work (1995) understanding how organisations encourages public institutions to make explicit the value they create for the public, and therefore has wider appeal for capturing the value of documentary collections. He states that the public value framework is:

*'A concept that encourages one to speak with expressive, passionate enthusiasm about the public value that one sees in reach and feels duty-bound to pursue, (and also) directs managerial attention to what is possible to achieve in a particular political and organisational setting.'*²⁹

Capturing Stakeholder Views

- ***Collections Demography***

One notable study that emerged from the AHRC/EPSRC-funded Heritage Science programme was the research project *Collections Demography: stakeholders' views on the value of the lifetime of collections*.³⁰ Significantly, this research departed from existing typologies of value, by considering how stakeholders perceive the value of archives and libraries collections in comparison with organisational perceptions of value. While the rationale for this study was concerned with using techniques to model the benefits that flow from a collection in relation to material change, thus differing in focus from the present review, key features of the project have resonance and provide a useful 'case-history' of the potential of stakeholders' perceptions of value as an important strand of evidence.

Using a robust attitudes questionnaire, the study undertook a survey of some 300 readers to understand the value or meaning that users ascribed to the documents they were using, including for example, attitudes to the core value of archives in terms of public value and evidence, discovery and engagement. By assembling credible evidence, it challenged existing notions of what is valued and why by users, and their expectations of current and future use. This corpus of evidence has been used as a basis for re-calibrating collection management programmes based on users' requirements.

The Collections Demography project usefully illustrates the power of using existing social science methodologies to ascertain values and benefits i.e. stakeholder views, as well as the application of computational modelling protocols. Importantly, this study looks forward as well as back, and thus offers prospective evidence, essential for planning and shaping practice.

- ***The Manchester Metrics Project: Measuring Visitor Experience***

The Manchester Metrics Project, another Arts Council England and the National Endowment for Science Technology and Art (NESTA) funded initiative, inspired by the 2010 Western Australian Department of Culture study,³¹ makes a significant departure from previous attempts to develop an evaluation tool to capture visitor experience. It measures the quality of service against nine indicators e.g. quality of experience, depth of engagement, quality of creative production, quality of cultural leadership and relationship to participation. Longitudinal data for engagement across 13 cultural organisations in Manchester is captured using downloaded surveys designed to evaluate the experience of participation in the cultural and heritage services before and after visiting an event or institution. Evaluation and reporting is fed back in real time. This is an impressive project that has developed quality indicators agreed by peers and public, and has potential for our sector to show the potential of consistent longitudinal studies.³²

Key Points:

- While all metrics and measures designed to evaluate cultural value are to a degree subjective, they can usefully be applied to documentary heritage. Economic value as a contribution to GDP makes a compelling case to funders, and can be demonstrated with adequate data. Easy measures such as the eventual sale of books derived from UK research, content licensing contracts, intellectual property rights, or the economic impact on local communities, could contribute to an evidence base. This kind of economic impact has been investigated for the arts, public libraries and some American libraries and archives. Assessment of social value and public value can contribute one form of evidence to an overall mix.
- Evidence that evaluates what is achieved (outcomes and outputs) is considered to be as important as the performance of services. Measuring outcomes and outputs is a key element of the 2016 *Culture White Paper*,³³ which could usefully be communicated to the sector.
- DCMS has provided substantial funding for most of the research and analysis undertaken for the cultural industries, and to some extent public libraries. While a single measure for demonstrating the value of documentary heritage collections is clearly desirable, this is unlikely to emerge, given that evaluation techniques are developed to address particular questions. However, despite the lack of an established evidence framework for the documentary sector as a whole, established metrics and evaluation protocols could provide the basis for an evidence framework.

III. Towards a Credible Evidence Base: What is Evidence, why we need it and how can it be developed?

The Oxford English Dictionary Definition of 'evidence' is: *the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.*³⁴ So far, we have presented metrics used to capture for example, the value of goods and services as the basis for evaluation. While data capture is essential, it forms only one part of an evidence base.

In his inaugural address earlier this year, Denis Meissner, recently elected President of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) argued for the need for better evidence to advocate effectively on behalf of the sector, indeed he has made this a mission for the SAA during his tenure. He identified the need for evidence thus: *'... Not the data we usually capture: number of collections, cubic footage, process efficiencies and so forth. Instead data that speaks to the value proposition, economic impact, audiences served and outcomes achieved.'*³⁵

Data collection for archives and libraries in the UK has been described as idiosyncratic, audience- and participant-driven analysis and performance evaluation. Moreover, while data capture is significant it largely goes unreported. This kind of capture soon becomes an end in itself and does not usefully evaluate the outcomes. It therefore fails to demonstrate the value and impact of services and programmes. If the sector is to develop a credible evidence base, it needs to move from bureaucratic performance measures alone to a much greater emphasis on capturing outcomes and the 'public' value these services provide, and then needs to be translated appropriately for different stakeholders. This is no easy task, but a great deal can be achieved by developing an evidence framework for different contexts, for example: advocacy, policy formation and improving practice.

To be valuable, an evidence base needs:

1. Clarity of purpose: what is to be achieved and why does it matter?
2. Data capture that can address the purpose and show positive benefits.
3. Clear presentation in the language of the particular audience.
4. Easy accessibility for users.

In looking at the potentially available data that could form part of a framework, it is clear that a large corpus of data is collected which has potential if it could be effectively mined. The examples that follow in **Table 1** are indicative of the number of data-sets that are available, although a cursory review identified a degree of fragmentation that makes data difficult to aggregate. See: Appendix 2 Metrics and their Application, for a brief overview of how metrics are often applied.

Both anecdotal and published resources highlight the lack of consistent reporting by the archive sector,³⁶ which calls into question the validity of some of the available data due to difficulties with consistency over time. Williams and Procter (2002) drew attention to a number of difficulties and made recommendations for improved data collection.³⁷ In investigations for this study, the author could not identify institutions that actively collect and preserve data on user habits. Where good practice does exist, data is rarely kept for more than two years. Seldom is it synthesised and used to demonstrate value or impact or indeed to drive organisational strategies.

Table 1. The Problem of Data and a wider evidence base: A Selected List

Data Source	Type of Data	Access	Other
DCMS Data	Arts Council England (ACE) supports a robust data-collection regime of relevance to the museum sector and public libraries in particular; historically, though, archives are not included as they do not fall within the ACE remit. Commissioned reports and museums accreditation scheme reporting are two sources of up-to-date available data, as well as other sources based on participation. The purpose is to spot trends, and feed decision-making into the policy domain. Data is accessible from the excellent ACE <i>Why Culture Matters</i> website that provides good evidence for sector professionals. ACE funds commissioned research to increase the understanding of the impact of culture on people’s lives.	Easily accessible through the ACE website	
CASE Data	CASE (Culture, Arts, Sports Engagement) is a strategic research programme funded by DCMS and English Heritage. Launched in 2008, the aim was to use interdisciplinary methods to inform the development of policy, to identify what is needed to inform policy and to understand what current data can inform questions of value and engagement. This is a very good searchable data-base of the capture of some 12,000 studies that offer for example, regional and local information and data tables, regional insights and trends, as well as reports on economic data, physical assets data, community and well-being data, tourism data and local culture data. It aims to provide credible evidence for spending reviews and could be useful to the documentary heritage sector.	Easily accessible through the CASE website	
Taking Part Data	The <i>Taking Part</i> survey commissioned in 2005 under New Labour by DCMS in partnership with English Heritage, the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council and Arts Council England, provides baseline data about cultural participation. <i>Taking Part</i> is now considered the most comprehensive longitudinal study, providing robust data to monitor participation and engagement. Public libraries are included in the study and although only a few questions relate to archives, discussions with the DCMS Evidence Unit suggest there may be scope for the inclusion of more questions. The recently published 2016-20 <i>Taking Part</i> strategy aims to gather high-quality data to meet government policy objectives and provides excellent summary reports on a regular basis.	Easily accessible through the Taking Part website	
Local Authority Generated Data	One of the principal difficulties in understanding the metrics and evidence used by local government is that many local services are now merged to a greater or lesser extent with related ones such as libraries (especially local studies libraries) and museums. One example is the North		

	<p>West service, which is based in the local town hall and measures visits on the basis of the people visiting the counter set up just outside the town hall toilets, an example of distorted data capture. The way in which the costs of council central services are allocated to public-facing departments may not necessarily reflect their actual usage by the archive service.</p> <p>It is worth noting that government has moved away from requiring local authorities to report any specific set of service details - councils now have much more freedom to report whatever they want, however they want, although in practice many still stick to traditional practice.</p>		
CIPFA: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountants Data	<p><i>Archives Services Statistics</i>, generally known as the CIPFA Statistics, is published annually by the Statistical Information Services (SIS) of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. It provides an annual return on local authority funded archives in England and Wales and is the most substantial source of data for archives collected over the last 15 years. The data collected covers storage capacity, distance enquiries, user experience e.g. purpose of enquiry, why remote services are used, staffing, some demographic information and items produced. Much of the data is behind a pay-wall, although synthesised reports are available from the Archives and Records Association (ARA) website.</p>	Available through subscription	
Public Service Quality Group (PSQG) Data	<p>The PQSG provides detailed data on archives, again largely focused on participation, and is available from the ARA website. Data on engagement e.g. number of visits and remote user satisfaction studies is used by many archive professionals.</p> <p>The National Archives' Archive Sector Development team uses this data to support certain elements of accreditation and advisory/engagement work, as well as any reports disseminated to the sector. There is no real equivalent for other parts of the sector, though SCOUNL statistics to some extent cover university archives. It is surprisingly difficult to discover comparable figures for many other 'nationals' such as the Imperial War Museum, National Maritime Museum, British Library etc.</p>		
Funders' Data: Heritage Lottery Fund	<p>The HLF collects significant data in project summary reports, mostly customer satisfaction information, although at present the information is not publically available in a synthesised form. Impact evaluations of volunteering have been published; this is one of the primary impact indicators for HLF.</p>		

<p>Wellcome Trust</p>	<p>Research Resources in Medical Humanities Grant Scheme (RR): RR has undertaken surveys of content and condition of collections. These reports give remarkably detailed information about standards of preservation, holdings user data for archives and some libraries. While focused on medical collections, this is a very rich seam of information about collections, use and historic importance. The published Research Resources Grants Directory provides a huge range of case-histories which could offer much to the development of a broader evidence base highlighting the value for research and public engagement and therefore impact long-term.</p>		
<p>Commercial Data</p>	<p>Commercial services such as Ancestry and Findmypast actively collect detailed data about the user experience, demographics, dwell times and geographical and other statistical data. This is not available to the host institution at present, although careful scrutiny of annual reports suggests there is considerable commercial value in records, given the profits these companies accrue.</p>		
<p>Professional Bodies' Data: CILIP</p>	<p>The professional body representing library and information professionals actively collects significant data about libraries and information services, but does not use the data at present to measure value qualitatively. It promotes projects such as LAMP and SALT (Surfacing the Long Tail of Data), a JISC-funded project in collaboration with the Universities of Manchester and Huddersfield, which aim to pull together and make sense of diverse data collected across the library sector.</p>		
<p>SCONUL</p>	<p>Over the last 30 years SCONUL has collected data from academic libraries and made it available through published annual reports. It is mainly used to identify trends and for benchmarking purposes and is largely focused on user statistics.</p>		

Narratives and Case-studies

While data capture and reporting provide an important strand of evidence, these cannot convey the complexity of the systems and experiences offered by documentary heritage services. In some situations narrative, or 'story telling' is an effective way to communicate what Brophy calls 'sensemaking', as a means of engaging meaningfully with some audiences.³⁸ There are many examples of community lectures offered by local authors and historians whose work has been based on documentary heritage research, and these in turn enable more stories to emerge, thus connecting communities to their past and present.³⁹ Case-histories are often championed as a compelling strand of evidence in some contexts, indeed they can be a powerful tool for engagement and persuasion, albeit with limitation unless they can be generalised, scaled-up or extrapolated to other contexts.

Key Points:

- Current data capture for the documentary heritage sector is largely focused on performance measures that are most often used to inform key indicators or to benchmark practice provision against other organisations. Data is also used for local management of services and for the strategic development of national and regional services.
- Assessment of several data-sets demonstrated that given there is no official requirement for data collection, much is captured voluntarily and is therefore idiosyncratic. Mapping exercises, survey results and some commissioned reporting over the last 15 years provide a picture of the sector, but the information is scattered and lacks cohesion. There are exceptions: the DCMS-sponsored *Taking Part* survey for example provides excellent regular reporting of quantitative and qualitative reporting through their website.⁴⁰
- Qualitative evaluation of user views is required if the public and social value of these services is to be understood. Rigorous research in this area is required.
- It is possible to glean some data on user profiles and use of services, however too often it is not up-to-date, easily accessible or comparable with other studies. Regrettably, there seems to have been little progress in gathering evidence systematically as recommended in publicly funded commissioned reports in 2002.⁴¹
- There is a conspicuous absence of data on primary user demographic data, patterns of use either online or on-site, and any data that is collected by institutions is seldom reported or retained to identify trends or to inform practice. This is striking as market segment analysis is commonplace in other parts of the sector.
- Academic research in this field is bedevilled by the scattered nature and inconsistency of data that does exist.

IV. Value to Impact

Impact is often defined as a 'change that occurs as a result of an experience, event or intervention.' Impacts can be good or bad and realised in the short-term and long-term, and will vary in different contexts. For example, demonstrating impact to advocate to politicians and using impact measures to manage services are significantly different. Impact is usually realised through stages: concurrent impacts, experience impacts (captured through post-event surveys and interviews) and extended impacts (retrospective impacts).⁴²

Over the course of this study examples surfaced from published sources or existing practices that prove economic, social and public value, and these can usefully demonstrate the impact of a range of services. For example:

Demonstrating Economic Value and Impact

- **Value of Helping Business and the Creative Economy to Grow**

The British Library's Innovation Centre reports that over a two-year period, it generated 829 new business propositions, creating 786 jobs, and that over 10,000 people attended individual events and workshops.

Business archives services create a unique corporate asset important for legal, marketing communications and financial decisions, and can give meaning and confidence to business decisions. Business archives inform a historic narrative which has demonstrated value by informing strategic business decisions that add value to the business.⁴³

The use of archives to inspire innovation is central to companies such as Fortnum and Mason, Liberty John Lewis and Standard Life to name just a few. Given commercial sensitivity associated with product development, and lack of time, it was not possible to ascertain the value of these collections to product development within this study, but this area is worthy of further analysis to understand the relationship of the archive as critical intelligence to business and industry.

- **Business and Enterprise: The Creative Economy**

The documentary heritage sector offers vital support to the creative economy. Documentary heritage services provide sources for the extensive literary canon that inspires our film, TV, theatre and cultural heritage experience, contributing to one of the UK's largest exports. How effective are we at capturing the public value of the process of creativity to innovation? How well do we advocate for the documentary heritage sector's contribution to the creative economy, and for that matter the economy as a whole?

- **Value of Digital Licensing and Data**

To serve the seemingly insatiable family history market, internet providers who license content from the documentary heritage sector, demonstrate the value of records. Ancestry, one of several commercial international reports a total profit in 2015 of \$29.4 million, from annual revenues of \$638 million generated by the public accessing 17 billion records.⁴⁴

- **Value of Heritage Science and Research**

The recently published White Paper notes that universities not only care for important museum collections, but are major supporters of culture and undertake ground-breaking research on heritage protection. Heritage science is a growing discipline that undertakes interdisciplinary research designed to improve the interpretation, access to and preservation of heritage assets. Heritage science is active in many documentary heritage collections and demonstrates added value through, for example, collaborations between collections and industry that are already developing products and services, thus adding economic value. For example, instrumentation for environmental management, apps for public engagement, and products that enable ways of 'searching the unsearchable', continue to be developed in co-operation with documentary heritage services. This produces economic value, demonstrating an impact on the UK's creative economy and supports the key pillars of the recently published Government Industrial Strategy.⁴⁵

Demonstrating Public Value

- **The importance of place**

As civic buildings disappear, archive and library buildings are being redefined as places for meeting and supporting communities through, for example, Fab Labs designed to improve digital literacy and address a very real social problem of isolation and disconnection from communities.⁴⁶ Providing this sense of place delivers social value.

- **The offer of health and well-being value**

There is considerable attention currently to finding correlations between the contribution documentary heritage collections can make to the health and well-being of citizens. For example, 'Not So Grim Up North', a project between University College London, Arts Council England and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums is just one of many projects underway in the UK seeking to understand the correlation between health benefits for example, of experiencing collections for people living with dementia, stroke rehabilitation and addiction recovery. The BBC's 'Rem Arc' awarding winning initiative and 'History Boxes' a Senate House Library initiative, works with dementia patients to develop personal memory 'boxes' filled with mementoes of personal histories and photographs. The History Box programmes are proving effective in stimulating memory and are supported by some NHS Trusts.⁴⁷ Programmes connecting collections to patient care and communities demonstrate improved well-being and value to communities, thus adding social and economic impact in the long term. The University of Sheffield's Centre for Wellbeing in Public Policy, The National Alliance for Museums, Health and Well-being (University College London) the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Arts, are just a few examples of the considerable attention this subject is presently receiving from academic researchers, local interest groups and government.

- **Learning and Education**

Research for Community History, and Access to Archaeology

This initiative is just one of many underway that has as its focus personal research to understand one's place in the community and world. A key driver is hands-on engagement with primary resources in local and national archives and archaeology, led by Professor Carenza Lewis, University of Lincoln, who has for many years collected data on the experience of connecting to history, with significant headline outcomes include reporting of previously uninterested students applying for university entrance. There are other similar projects around the country that foster improved ICT and project management skills and team working, for example, as significant outcomes that align with the national curriculum. Mapping these projects and evaluating the value added by archive and library services could contribute significantly to a sector evidence base.

Demonstrating Social Value

- **The value of social justice and trusted information**

Public inquiries such as the Hillsborough stadium disaster and child sex abuse investigations across the UK and Ireland are only possible because of the preservation of the archival record, the raw data underpinning a range of investigations. Consider the loss in trust in the public realm, and the rule of law without this evidence base? While the social value of this evidence base seems obvious, capturing and evaluating this value is required. There is no better time as we live in a world where the rule of law is challenged and individuals and groups are under threat. Archives are uniquely valuable in demonstrating a direct impact on social justice, in that the information in collections provides public evidence for judging accountability and thus supports the upholding of the rule of law.

- **The value of academic research and development**

The published outputs of UK academic research are among the highest in the world, contributing to UK innovation and growth and informing policy-making. There are numerous examples of

documentary heritage professionals who have established effective collaboration with schools and universities, providing greater access to collections and thus to academic opportunities. The value of these learning experiences provides social and economic impact long term, and while gaining visibility in the Research Excellence Framework, greater recognition of academic value of these services could be an important advocacy tool. While the Research Excellence Framework presents a number of documentary heritage impact evaluations as case histories, widening and deepening the notion of research 'impact' to include influence on public engagement and culture and on teaching needs to be better understood by professionals to become mainstream. These critical collection services add economic and public value that could be evaluated and captured routinely.

V. Capturing the numbers: toolkits, models, frameworks

It can be difficult to demonstrate impact because it is time-consuming and therefore often costly to capture data long term. Nevertheless there are models that could be usefully exploited in some contexts, for example, the DCMS Evidence Toolkit,⁴⁸ and Simon Tanner's 'Measuring the Impact of Digital Resources: The Balanced Value Impact Model' offers potential, although initial trials found it too complicated for some organisations and it has therefore has less take-up than it should.⁴⁹ Peter Brophy's published model suggests a scale of assessment that captures the individual change, from 'raised awareness' at one end of the spectrum, to a 'changed world view' at the other.⁵⁰ NESTA's *Alliance for Useful Evidence* has published an evidence framework for clinical trials,⁵¹ elements of which could usefully be adopted for our sector depending on the purpose of the evaluation. Understanding the purpose of the impact evaluation should be the starting-point of any analysis.

Further evaluation would be required to determine the usefulness for the sector and should be taken forward.

VI. Do we have the right professional and political skills to influence and demonstrate the value and impact of our sector?

Over the course of this review, several consistent messages emerged. While there is appreciation amongst professionals of the need to demonstrate better the value of collection and the services they offer, and the importance of capturing evidence in support of organisations and the wider sector, few of those interviewed felt equipped to use evidence effectively. Better understanding of the impact methodologies and the skills and knowledge to support evidence-based decisions would be welcome.

At present there is a lack of co-ordination, no one-stop shop for evaluation, data co-ordination or the presentation of synthesised evidence to support the sector, nor are there cross-sector, co-ordinated professional or political relationships in place to drive an evidence-based impact agenda, although the DCMS supported Libraries Task Force is driving this imperative. There was a very clear consensus that support from professional bodies and sector leaders would be welcome as would an easily accessible, clearing-house/hub for evidence appropriate for different contexts. This actively needs to be pursued.

VII. Summary: Conclusions and Next Steps

Conclusions

The key finding of this study shows that the value of documentary heritage services can be readily demonstrated both to primary users, who use and experience collections first-hand, and to a much wider group of secondary users who benefit from the services provided by archives and libraries. The contribution these services can make to the UK economy and to wider society is significant, as is the impact that can be realised in the short and longer term. However, the documentary heritage sectors fall woefully short in effectively communicating its contribution to influence policy-making or operational management. If there is to be a chance of a sustainable future in the face of ongoing reductions in budgets, the sector needs to get better at this.

Discussions with sector leaders, Chief Executives of services, local authority representatives, Directors and a Government Minister confirmed that defending these services against other statutory obligations is difficult. How can one reasonably argue for maintaining collection services over the potential loss of twenty social workers? I was told it is essential to have 'a backpack' full of stories, statistics and evaluations that can be used with 'authority' and 'conviction', if advocacy is to be successful.

Another important point emerged from discussion. Senior leaders need evidence to demonstrate the effects of 'loss of services' and the economic and social impact these would have e.g. declining literacy levels. Loss of value and absence of impact has yet to be reported, but would be worthy of extensive study.

Next steps: a strategic approach

Foster the right culture

The defence of the sector depends crucially on commonly agreed objectives, strong cross-sector leadership, compelling evidence and a willingness to embrace change. This report makes clear these desiderata are a long way off, but if action is not taken, the sector can expect dwindling resources and a continued decline in users. The days of strictly held divisions between archives and libraries are over, given that archives, libraries and local history services are all facing the same pressure of reduced budgets and the shifting expectations of users for ever more digital provision. All the focus groups and discussions conducted in relation to this project confirm there is a genuine grassroots thirst for change and a need for a policy direction to demonstrate the impact of these valuable services.

There are already some clear ways forward. The recently published Government-backed National Archives strategy, *Archives Unlocked*⁵², sets out an ambitious programme to build resilience for the sector by, for example, demonstrating the impact of services through better data collection and impact evaluation. The TNA/RLUK annual conference and a determination to improve leadership in the university library sector are other examples of change. However, these fall short of an unambiguous single voice for the documentary heritage sector as a whole, which is required to engage with important work in this area within DCMS.

Recommendation: Establish a cross-sector task force

It is recommended as a first step that a cross-sector independent task force should be set up, to include national, local, professional, government and academic experts to co-create and co-deliver a strategic plan to develop an evidence-based culture for the documentary heritage sector, building on existing cross-sector activity, other evaluation studies taking place and the potential momentum ignited by this report.

The priority actions for the Task Force should include:

1. Upgrading skills and knowledge

Prioritise skilling up professionals in the documentary heritage sector to help them develop an evidence-based culture, including understanding the metrics, tools, and impact models available. They see the importance of using evidence to demonstrate the value of their services, but often feel too ill-equipped and time-strapped to mine the range of information necessary to make a case. This requires collaboration with professional bodies such as the Archives and Records Association, lead organisations such as The National Archives and Research Libraries UK, The National Records of Scotland, National Library of Wales, The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, as well as regional bodies, academic experts, grant-giving bodies and funders.

Encourage professionals to be more aware of, and committed to, evidence-based practice, the value of assessing outcomes and impact, and evaluating stakeholder needs. It is important that local needs and priorities are addressed, while feeding into or contributing to regional and national data collections.

2. Capturing data and using tools

- Support development of cross-sector standards for data-capture for the documentary heritage sector, in collaboration with allied initiatives already underway, for example, AHRC's Cultural Values project, the Library Task Force and the DCMS Evidence Unit.
- Understand the services different users need to build an evidence-based culture.
- Evaluate the usefulness of guidance and toolkits designed for evaluation and capturing impact.
- Pilot existing technologies already used by the museum sector designed to capture stakeholder experiences.
- Develop evidence-based resources through an online portal to share evaluations and disseminate research in this area.

3. Addressing Research Gaps

Identify the research and evaluation studies required to capture better the value added by documentary heritage services, and to track the impact of services to government, the public and researchers. The key findings of this project could usefully be taken forward as the basis of a national research strategy for documentary heritage collection.

Develop a shared research strategy setting out the evaluation research required to demonstrate the economic, social, and public value of documentary heritage industries.

Undertake to secure research funding to comprehensively evaluate the value and impact of the documentary heritage sector's collections and wealth of services they provide.

¹ Documentary heritage is defined in this document as: collections as a cultural product kept in archives and libraries, or user-generated content, all the written documents created at present as well as the past that can inform future heritages. See: Ashworth & Graham (2005), p.8. The term better reflects the blurring of collections across archive and library domains, as silos between these sectors are breaking down and they are often being merged within collecting institutions, accepting that the mission of archives and libraries differ.

² Strathern (ed.) (2000), p.3.

³ Crossick & Kaszynska (2015), p.7.

⁴ HM Treasury (1965) (Cmnd 2601).

⁵ DCMS (2004a).

⁶ Re:source (The Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives) (2001).

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archives-for-the-21st-century.pdf>

⁷ There were many voices championing alternatives to a purely instrumentalist view, for example, Tessa Jowell, then Secretary for Culture, Media and Sport, in a 2004 speech acknowledged: 'a lack of convincing language and political argument for how arts and culture are at the heart of a healthy society.' Available at:

https://shiftyparadigms.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/tessa_jowell.pdf

⁸ Walmsley (2016), p.2

⁹ Scott (2010), p.2

¹⁰ Holden (2006), p.16

¹¹ Holden (2006), p.17

¹² The literature is extensive; the most recent evaluation reports are available through the DCMS website.

¹³ Crewe (2016)

¹⁴ Crossick & Kaszynska (2015)

¹⁵ DCMS (2016), p.58

¹⁶ Carnwath & Brown (2014)

¹⁷ Yakel et al. (2012)

¹⁸ First library study

¹⁹ Tessler (2013)

²⁰ Jura Consultants (2005)

²¹ For a fuller description of government evaluation protocols see: *The Green Book* (HM Treasury, 2003). The *Magenta Book* (HM Treasury, 2011) provides excellent guidance on what to consider when designing an evaluation.

²² Carnwath & Brown (2014), p.32

²³ See for example:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416279/A_review_of_the_Social_Impacts_of_Culture_and_Sport.pdf

²⁴ Department for Culture Media & Sport (DCMS). (2017). *Taking Part 2016/17. Statistical release. Quarter 2, England, October 2015 – September 2016*. Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586932/Taking_Part_2016-17_Q2_Report.pdf

²⁵ A firm causal link has yet to be determined. For a good review of this subject see: Fujiwara et al (2014).

²⁶ See: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20benefits%20of%20public%20libraries.pdf>

²⁷ See: <http://www.healthandculture.org.uk/not-so-grim-up-north/about-the-research/>

²⁸ Holden (2004) and (2006)

²⁹ Mark Moore has written extensively on the subject of public value. See for example: Moore (1995).

³⁰ See: Dillon et al (2012)

³¹ See: <http://walga.asn.au/getattachment/Policy-Advice-and-Advocacy/Community-Development/Arts-and-Culture/Arts-and-Culture-and-WA-Local-Government-Report-2015.pdf.aspx?lang=en-AU>

³² For a fuller description of the project see: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Manchester_Metrics_Stage_One_Report_Dec_2013.pdf

³³ DCMS (2016), p. 62.

³⁴ For further analysis and useful descriptions of concurrent experienced, and extended impacts see: Carnwath and Brown, p.91.

³⁵ Meissner (2015) Collecting Data That Demonstrates Value, *Archival Outlook*, January/February 2016.

³⁶ Pickford (2002), p. 9.

³⁷ Williams & Procter (2002)

³⁸ Brophy (2007)

³⁹ Decker reports, and Digital Narrative

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey>

⁴¹ Wavell et al (2002), p.

⁴² Carnwath & Brown (2014), p.25.

⁴³ Williams et al. (2005)

⁴⁴ See: <http://www.ancestry.com/corporate/newsroom/press-releases/ancestrycom-llc-reports-fourth-quarter-and-full-year-2015-financial-results>

⁴⁵ DBEIS (2017).

⁴⁶ See: <http://fablabsuk.co.uk>

⁴⁷ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/taster/projects/remarc> ; personal conversation Dr N. Barratt, Uof London

⁴⁸ DCMS (2004b)

⁴⁹ Tanner (2012)

⁵⁰ Brophy (2007)

⁵¹ Breckon (2016)

⁵² The National Archives. (2017). *Archives unlocked*. Available at:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/Archives-Unlocked-Brochure.pdf>

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank The National Archives for their support while a Visiting Scholar at Northumbria University iSchool in 2016-17. A very warm thanks to my colleagues Professor Michael Moss, Professor Julie McLeod and Dr David Thomas, Visiting Professor at Northumbria, for their enthusiasm and critical support over the 12 months. And with grateful acknowledgement to all those who generously gave of their time and shared their expertise in responding to questions raised during this project:

Dr Nick Barrett, Senate House Library, University of London
Dr Chris Batt, former Chief Executive, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
Dr Neil Beagrie, Charles Beagrie Ltd.
Caroline Brazier, Assistant Director, The British Library
Karen Brookfield, Heritage Lottery Fund
Dr Geoffrey Browell, Head of Service, King's College London Archives
Dr Adam Cooper, Lecturer in Social Sciences and Public Policy, UCL
Dr Ben Cowell, Director General, Historic Houses Association
Louise Craven, Independent Archive Researcher
Professor Geoffrey Crossick, co-author of the AHRC-funded *Understanding Cultural Value*
Professor Mary Daly, President, Royal Irish Academy, and Commissioner, Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, Ireland
Jon Elliott, External Affairs and Communication, Archives and Records Association
Lucy Fletcher, The National Archives
Heather Forbes, Chief Executive, Gloucester Archives Services
Professor Charles Harvey, Newcastle University
Dr Andrew Holden, Consultant, *Activist*
Isobel Hunter, Head of Archive Sector Development, The National Archives
Dr Ewan Hyslop, Head of Research, Historic Scotland
John Jackson, Head of Science Policy and Research, Natural History Museum
Jeff James, Chief Executive, The National Archives
Julia Jones, Information Manager, The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, England and Wales
Dr Patrycja Kaszynska, AHRC, Cultural Values Project
Caroline Kimbell, Director of Commercial Licensing, Senate House Library, University of London
Dr Nick Kingsley, Archivist, formerly Head, Archive Sector Development, The National Archives
Professor Carenza Lewis, Director, Centre of the Public Understanding of Research
Mark O'Neill, former Director, Glasgow Museums
Dr Geoff Pick, Chief Executive, London Metropolitan Archives
Dr Michael Riordan, Archivist, St John's and The Queen's College Archives, University of Oxford
Professor Eugene Rogan, Director, The Middle East Centre, University of Oxford
Kathy Settle, Chief Executive, DCMS Libraries Task Force
Anne Slater, National Records of Scotland
Lert Wasanikormkulchai, PhD student, University of Glasgow
Dr Liz White, Head of Strategy, The British Library
Dr Frankie Wilson, Head of Assessment and Secretariat, Oxford University Libraries

Appendix 1. Terms and Definitions

Advocacy: an important investment we make to strategically educate and engage to support our aims.

Cultural value: In the field of cultural economics, cultural value refers to value created by cultural goods, services and experiences that is not economic value. Others use the term 'cultural value' to refer to the way in which cultural institutions produce value.

Cultural Capital: The accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power, and forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society. Cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange. Two distinct meanings are attached to this term, one is economic, the other sociological. Carnwath and Brown (2014) note that both relate to the capacity to '*realise cultural capital*' as a result of engaging and benefiting from cultural goods.

Evaluation: To understand or assess the worth of something. In the context of this study, evaluation is used to describe an objective assessment exercise of a wide range of evidence, not just economic, to understand, for example, the effectiveness of a policy.

Creative economy: DCMS defines the creative economy as industries derived from creativity, the skills and talents of individuals, as well as having the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Archives and library sector activities contribute to the creative economy.

Documentary heritage: That which we find, both material and conceptual, in the past which forms part of today's culture. User-generated content, all the written documents created in the present as well as the past that can inform future heritage. (Ashworth and Graham (2005), p. 8: '*...simultaneously knowledge, a cultural product and a political resource.*')

Economic value: The measurable value of an exchange usually between money and a product, which reflects supply and demand. In the context of culture and heritage there are other ways economic value can be realised: directly from selling (information, books, tickets); or indirectly, as in value gained from indirect spend, for example the costs associated with the experience. Holden offers a broader perspective: 'economic value is the extent to which something enhances or detracts from our well-being.'

For example:

- Contingent Valuation/ Willingness to Pay
- Cost-Benefit Analysis
- Subjective well-being

Intrinsic value: A term debated across disciplines and is usually something that is valuable for some intrinsic property. Holden elaborates, suggesting 'intrinsic' value 'is the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually' and debunks the view that culture has some value in itself. Intrinsic value includes the subjective experience of culture.

Impact: An impact implies that something changes as a result of an experience or event and this can be good or bad, short-term and long-term. The impact of an action or experience is culturally laden and externally construed (See: Bakhshi and Throsby, 2010). The literature uses the term in different

contexts and within the scope of this report it is important to distinguish between them, for example:

- **Academic Impact:** The demonstrable contribution that research and the services provided by publicly funded institutions make to society and the economy. This occurs in many ways: through creating and sharing new knowledge and innovation; inventing ground-breaking new products; creating businesses and jobs.
(See: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/impacts>)
- **Economic impact:** The effect of an event on the economy in a specified area. It usually measures changes in business revenue, business profits, personal wages, and/or jobs. The economic event analysed can include the implementation of a new policy or project, or may simply be the presence of a business or organisation. An economic impact analysis is commonly conducted when there is public concern about the potential impacts of a proposed project or policy.
- **Individual impact:** The ways in which the experience of, for example, engaging with archives or libraries can affect the individual in the short and long term.
- **Social impact:** The value to society of a cultural sector.

Measures: in the case of an archive or library, the result of taking a measure of some quantifiable object or process involved in the delivery of the service or use of an archive or special collections library. (See: *Standardized Statistical Measures and Metrics for Public Service in Archival Repositories and Special Collections.*)

Metrics: a calculated ratio between two measures, or an independent variable, most often an increment of time (i.e. rate). Metrics can be used to quantify and compare changes that occur in a repeated process over time or in the relationship between two processes. As such they can be used to identify trends and summaries of success.

Public realm: ‘the web of values, places and organisations, rules, knowledge and other cultural resources held in common by people through their everyday commitments and behaviours, and held in trust by government and public institutions.’

Public Value: The value public institutions contribute. Public value differs from economic or social value: the latter is created value.

Social Value: The benefits to society that can be realised from engaging in culture, for example improved health, or better educational attainment. The benefits can relate to the individual as well as society at large.

Value: The relative status of a thing, or the estimate in which it is held, according to real or supposed worth, usefulness or importance. We confer meaning and worth on objects; value is a conversion ratio, e.g. to ‘heritage’. The value bestowed is linked to the value they have in society e.g. aesthetic, utility, economic, political.

The term ‘value’ confers many different meanings, although there is general agreement that value is not inherent in objects or events, but is attributed to them by the beholder. It drives what we do, and allows us to make judgements (See: Holden, 2006).

Appendix 2. Metrics and their application

Application	Metric	Relevance to Doc Heritage	Pros and Cons
Regulatory impact assessments Setting priorities for investment	Cost benefit analysis Contingent valuation	Policy formation, e.g. the value of having an archive and library locally.	A good source of credible evidence. Recommended by the <i>Green Book</i> , used extensively in environmental studies, so a long tradition. Expensive.
Demonstrating value/benefits of collections; impact assessments.	Subjective well-being studies.	Funding/ budget justification; social impact measures.	Doesn't meet government assessment criteria. Correlation yet to be determined.
Priorities for resource allocation	Evidence of stakeholders, predictive modelling i.e. demographic methods.	Setting priorities.	
Key Performance Indicators	Statistical analysis of organisational activity: CIPFA data, PSQRG.	Meets statutory reporting requirements.	Quantitative assessment, notoriously unreliable, can't be aggregated easily.
Reported examples of demonstrable impact	Case-histories.	Many good examples exist not captured in the literature.	Retrospective, subjective, difficult to scale up.

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