



Benchmark Study of UK Museum Long Loan and Disposal Activity July 2007

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Museums Association

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Foreword

This piece of research is part of the Effective Collections programme of work from the Museums Association (MA) to make better use of stored collections through long loans and disposal. In gauging current levels of long loan and disposal activity in UK museums and galleries it gives the programme a benchmark to work from, and also identifies obstacles to increased activity that Effective Collections must help museums to overcome.

The conclusions made in this report are largely expected and often encouraging. It is promising to hear that so many museums want to lend and borrow more, and reassuring that museums are keen to permanently transfer objects to enable greater access to them. It is also unsurprising that museums plan for disposal much more than they undertake it, and predictable that museums are wary of long loans to non-museum locations.

The challenge now for Effective Collections is to tailor its work to the problems reported by museums. We aim to make lending easier through straightforward loans administration; to train staff to care for objects in the long-term; and to make appropriate disposal a positive process through training and new guidance.

Stored collections should be better used and over the next five years Effective Collections will help museums to change their practices and increase their capacity to share objects. At the end of that time we will repeat this research and hope to show that the same obstacles don't exist and that the numbers of long loans and disposals have significantly increased.

For more information about Effective Collections, see the MA website: www.museumsassociation.org/collections.

Sally Cross
Collections Coordinator, Museums Association

Key Points

Loans:

1. The vast majority of museums, 96%, would lend items from their collection in principle. Of these 84% are keen to lend more items from their collections (Section 3.1).
2. Over half of the museums surveyed are keen to borrow more items on long loan, with the greatest interest from the independent and local authority sectors (Section 3.1).
3. A quarter to a third of museums in the survey are not involved in making any long loans-out, only providing loans for temporary exhibitions (Section 3.2). However, many museums have large numbers of long loans-in, with a large proportion of these being from private owners. Some items are classed as being long loans-in because their status is unclear or the documentation is inadequate (Sections 3.3 and 3.4).
4. The bulk of the loan activity in 2006 was short term and likely to be related to temporary exhibitions. Where long loans were requested, most museums were only asked for one or two items. Many long loans are long standing and new long loans are not being regularly made (Section 3.5).
5. In order to facilitate more long loans the barriers to making loans, which include issues of security, environmental conditions and a museums capacity to loan, need to be addressed (Sections 3.1 and 3.6).
6. Apart from national museums, museums prefer to make long loans only to other museums (Section 3.7).
7. 78% of museums had written agreements for all their loans-out compared with 47% having agreements for all their loans-in (Section 3.8)

Disposals:

1. The vast majority of museums, 96%, have a collection management policy that includes disposal. However, only 62% have ever disposed of items from their collections (Section 4.1).
2. Over the last 3 years, many museums have not made any disposals (Section 4.2).
3. The main reason cited by museums for disposing of items from the collection is lack of relevance to collecting policy (Section 4.3).
4. About 46% of museums that have disposed of items always have external consultation or peer review prior to disposals (Section 4.4).
5. The complexity and time required to undertake the disposal process was often cited as a reason for the low numbers of items actually removed from collections (Section 4.5).
6. Three quarters of museums wanted to dispose of more items from their collections, and all the national museums surveyed indicated that they wanted to do this (Section 4.5).
7. Museums are willing to dispose of items if that would improve access to them. However, there are concerns about transferring items to private ownership before the profession and public have had time to consider the long-term implications of this type of disposal (Section 4.5).

1. Project Aims and Methodology

The aim of the project was to identify levels of long loan and disposal activity in 100 museums across the UK to establish a benchmark against which the impact of the Museums Association Effective Collections project can be tested in future.

The benchmark, which provides a snapshot of long loan and disposal activity in current and recent years, was established in May and June 2007 via:

- Quantitative data provided via an on-line survey from 113 museums located across the UK in percentages that reflect the different museum types in the country (see appendix 1). The complete data set will be retained by the Museums Association and used for comparison analysis at the end of the Effective Collections project.
- Follow-up calls to over 20 museums to finesse understanding of replies and the commentary in the report below
- 4 case studies that give a qualitative context for long loan and disposal activity (see separate paper).

For the purpose of this study long loans are defined as loans over 3 years and have been divided in to two time periods: 3-5 years, and over 5 years. Loans from specific collections used for school loans are outside the scope of this study and have been excluded.

Disposal activity was requested over the last three years to ensure that enough data was gathered, as museums do not dispose of items each year.

2. Museums in the survey

Responses were received from 113 museums; of these 8 were national museums, 52 local authority, 9 university and 41 independent. There were three museums run as partnerships between a local society and local authority; a local authority and an independent trust; and a local authority and national government. Of the 113 museums, 18 were members of Renaissance hubs, and 111 were Registered or Accredited museums.

These returns provided a good range of types and sizes of museum, in proportions, which reflect the UK museum sector. A good geographic spread between regions and home nations was obtained, with at least seven responses from each of the nine regions and three home nations. The sample, therefore, provides a good benchmark of loan and disposal activity (see appendix 1).

The overall results are presented without any weighting to adjust for the different sample sizes, but where meaningful conclusions can be drawn, the results are analysed within their individual types. In most cases, there were no particular trends observed by analysing museums across the regions and home nations.

3. Loans

Before looking in detail at loan activity, it is useful to consider the overarching principles and policy which underpin this activity.

3.1 Principles and Policy

The survey showed that the vast majority of museums, 109 out of 113 (96%), would lend items from their collection, in principle. However, a number of the curators of smaller museums indicated that they had never received any request to lend items from their collection. Of the four museums that did not loan-out as a principle, two of these were very small museums with limited staff capacity.

Of the museums that lend items, 86 out of 102 responding to the question, (84%) would be keen to lend more items from their collections, and the percentages were very similar across the four different types of museums.

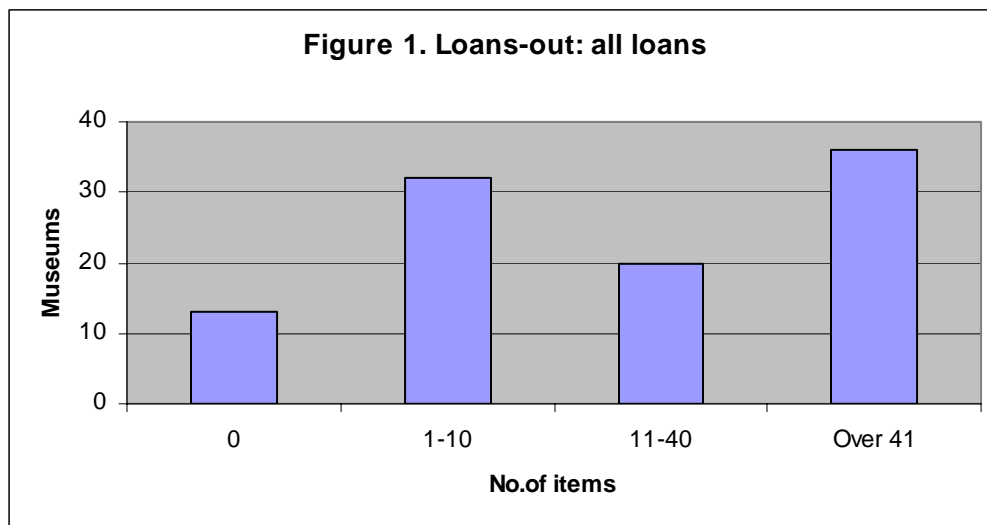
There were 16 museums that did not want to lend more, and these included a wide range of sizes and types of museums. The survey indicates that one of the principal reasons for this decision relates to the organisation's capacity; smaller museums having a limited capacity to deal with loan requests and the larger museums having reached their maximum capacity for dealing with the large number of loan requests that they receive. One large museum had taken a decision to reduce the number of loans during a period of redevelopment.

Compared with the 96% of museums that would lend, a slightly smaller percentage in this benchmark would borrow items in principle, but at 103 of 113 museums (91%) this difference is not statistically significant.

Of the 91 museums that have actually borrowed items, 51 (56%) were keen to borrow more objects on long loan from other museums. Across the types of museums, the numbers of museums wanting more long loans-in are:

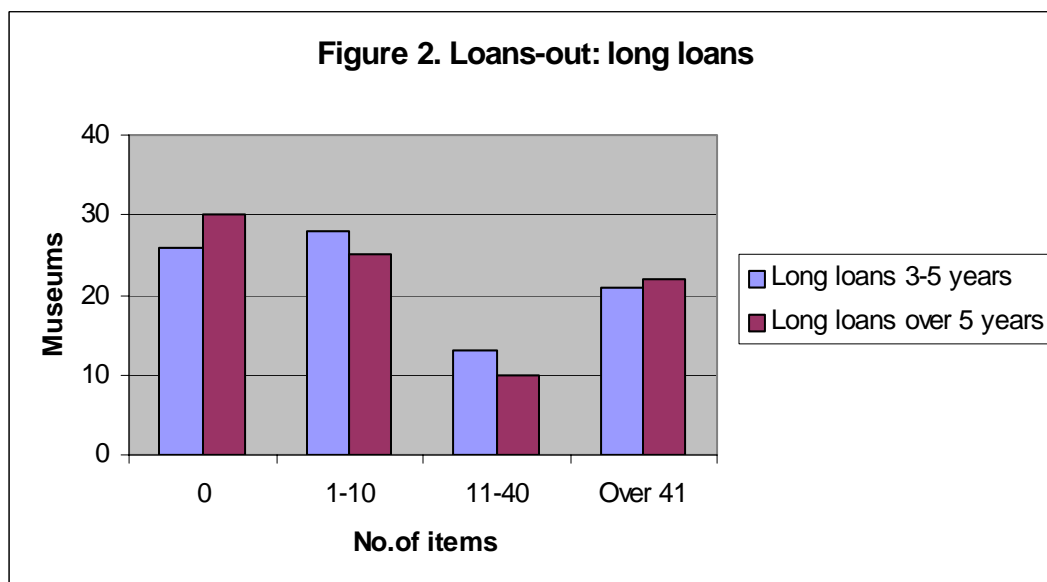
- 26 of 46 (57%) of local authority museums
- 20 of 28 (71%) of the independent museums
- 1 of 6 (17%) of university museums
- 2 of 8 (25%) of national museums
- 2 of 3 (67%) of museums which described themselves as 'other'

3.2 Loans-out



From the survey and follow-up calls, it is clear that much of the loan out activity relates to short-term loans associated with temporary exhibitions. As might be expected, larger museums reported the highest number of loans-out, reflecting the demand for loan of their collections, particularly for short-term exhibitions. Many museums reporting 'over 41' loans indicated that their numbers were in the 100s, although they were often only able to give rough estimates of the actual number of items.

Of the museums that lend items, over half have some long loans-out (figure 2): 62 museums (62%) have loans-out for 3-5 years and 57 museums (56%) over 5 years. The majority of those reporting 'over 41' long loans-out are larger museums. The largest number of long loan items identified was about 1800 lent by one museum to a range of museums for periods of over 5 years.



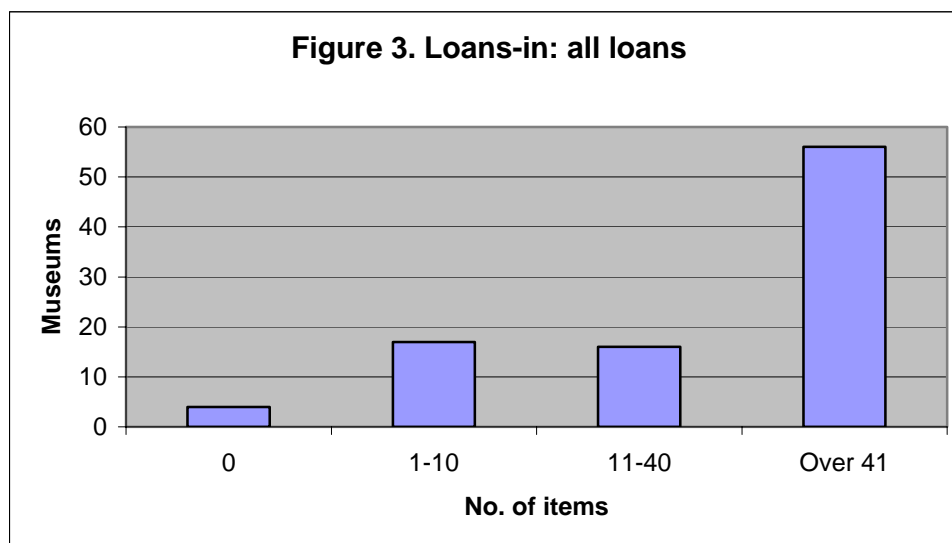
Appendix 2 gives a breakdown of loans-out by museum type

Follow up calls with the local authority museums reporting larger numbers of long loans-out, found that some of the 3-5 year loans are renewable loans to specific museums or organisations, often where there is a formal relationship. The 'over 5 year' loans, included loans which have been on loan to the same institution for many years, e.g. a local authority museum lending a collection for display by an independent trust in their museum. A particular example of a type of long loan reported by some local authority museums was the loan of civic items for display in council buildings for extended periods.

A number of independent museums with specialist collections reported larger numbers of long loans-out. Many of these collections are lent to museums, but some are lent to other organisations for display and these include loans to premises that may not comply with all the museum standards of security and environment. For example, some military museums lend items to their regiment for display in regimental buildings.

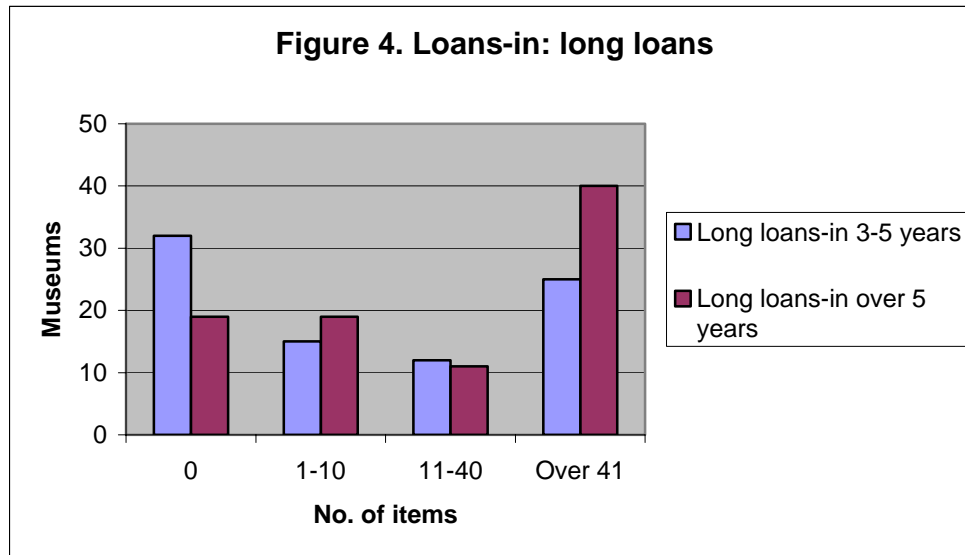
It is worth noting the museums that reported no loans-out at present, with local authority and independent museums making up the majority of these. 13 museums (13%) reported having no loans-out. This rises to 26 museums with no long loan activity of '3-5 years', and then to 30 museums with no loans 'over 5 years', (see figure 2). Therefore a quarter to a third of museums in the survey are not involved in long loans, making only short-term loans for temporary exhibitions as required.

3.3 Loans-in



A slightly smaller number of museums, 103 of 113 (91%), borrowed items from other organisations compared with the 96% of museums that would lend items.

There were more museums reporting that they had 'over 41 items' loaned-in (56), than reported they had 'over 41 items' loaned-out (36). The local authority and national museums reported the highest number of items loaned to them, which is likely to reflect their active exhibition programmes. At the time of the survey, four museums that would borrow items had no items in on loan.



Of the museums that borrowed, 52 museums (55%) had items on loan from 3-5 years and 70 museums (74%) had items on loan for over 5 years (see figure 4). In the 3-5 year loan period, the 25 museums which had 'over 41' items loaned-in tended to be the larger museums. In the over 5 year period, 40 museums had over 41 items on loan. Although the category is still dominated by the larger museums, a quarter are smaller museums, particularly independents, with large numbers of long loans that are likely to be for display.

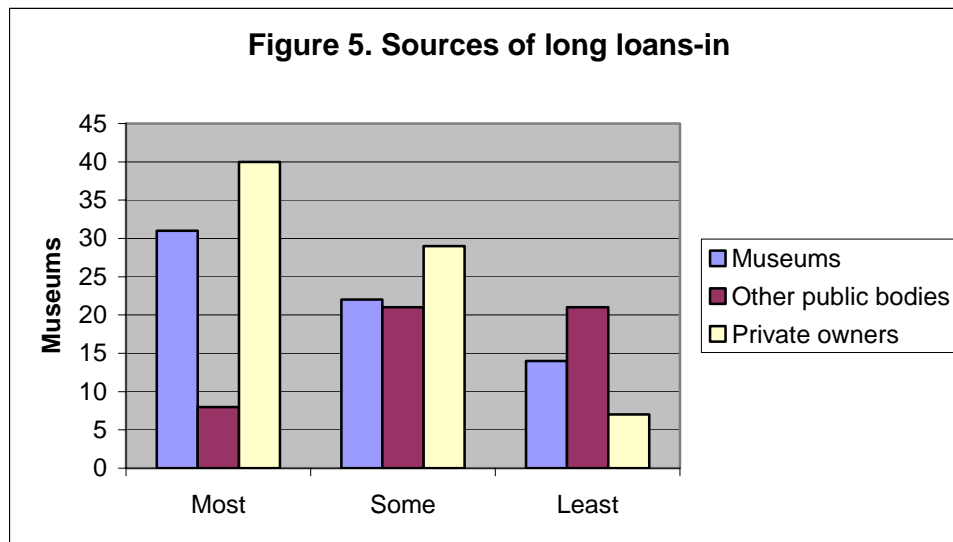
Appendix 2 gives a breakdown of loans-in by museum type.

From follow-up work for the survey, it is clear there are a number of reasons for local authority museums having 'over 41 items' loaned-in for over 5 years. They may have long loan material that is displayed, and many of these items are from private owners. Secondly, there are long loans that could be termed 'legacy' loans. These were loans set up many years ago (in one case over 100 years ago) and whose current status is often unclear. Some items are also classed as being loans because there was no clear documentation at the time the objects came into the museum, and it is unclear whether the items were loans or donations. Museums with this type of loan have identified that this is an area that requires attention. However, if the objects were safe within the museum, the majority of staff responses indicated that there were other more urgent imperatives to prevent starting on this task that is viewed as time-consuming and difficult.

Many independent museums also have long loans from private owners, such as private collections loaned to military and sporting museums. In a few cases, independent museums also have large loaned-in collections from a public body that they manage and display.

3.4 Sources of long loans-in

Overall, museums with long loans-in received most loans from private owners, with slightly fewer from other museums.



Within the types of museums, the main source of these long loans-in was:

- Local authority museums: private owners and other museums
- Independent museums: private owners
- University museums: private owners
- National museums: other museums.

This indicates that, apart from the national museums, many museums care for a number of long loans from private owners, including items within the museum where the status of the items may be uncertain (see section 3.3). Some curators indicated that they would like to review these long loans from private owners to see if they were still required, as the museum was bearing the cost of collections care and insurance for the items. In the independent sector, private owners included those lending personal sports or military items, as well as items lent to these museums in the early days of their establishment and that remain on display.

3.5 Loan activity in 2006

In this section of the questionnaire museums were asked to report on actual levels of loan activity in 2006.

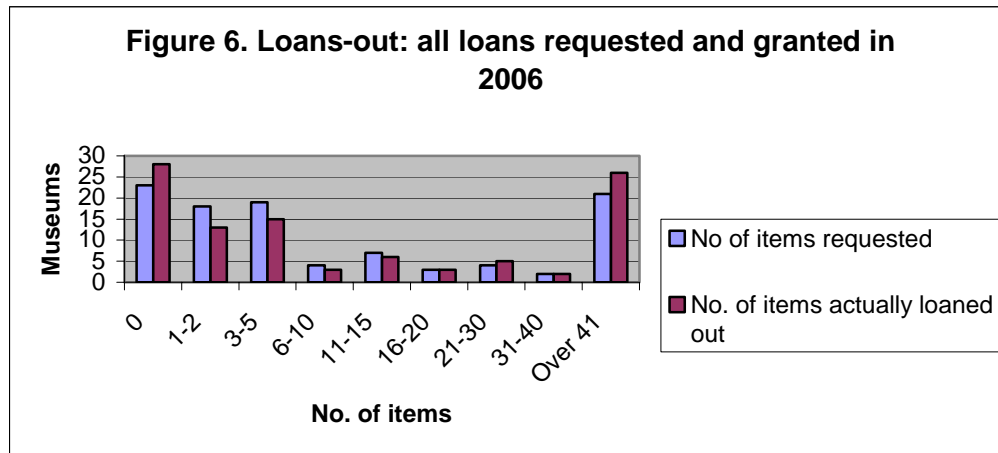
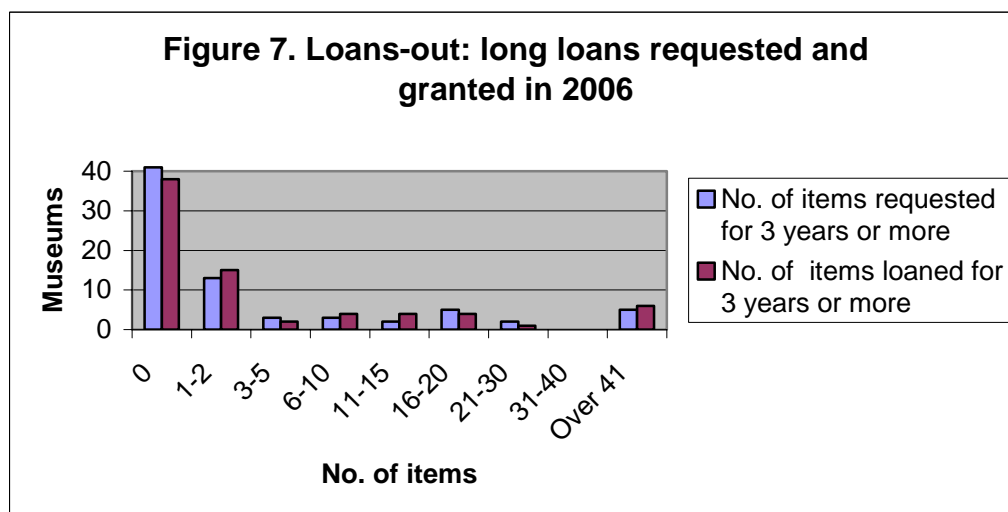


Figure 6 shows a snapshot of loan activity in 2006 amongst museums that indicated that they loaned items from their collections. In broad terms it shows that either few loans were requested from them and made, or many were. Just under a quarter of the sample had no requests at all for loans-out.

The museums lent slightly fewer items than they had requests for, and the reasons for refusing requests are explored later in the report. In some of the ranges, the number of items loaned out exceeds the number of items requested; this is accounted for by the time lag between requests arriving and making the loans. For example, a museum could have received requests for loans-out in 2005 and lent the items in 2006.



A comparison between figures 6 and 7 shows that there is a significant difference between total numbers of loan requests and long loan requests. Although 21 museums received requests for over 41 items on loan, only 5 museums received requests for long loans, i.e. the bulk of the loan activity was short term and presumably related to temporary exhibitions. Figure 7 also indicates that, where long loans were requested and granted, most museums were only asked for one or two items.

Comparing the total number of long loans-out reported in section 3.2, (62 museums with loans-out from 3-5 years, and 57 with loans-out over 5 years) with the activity reported in 2006 suggests that many of these long loans are long standing and new long-term loans are not being regularly requested and granted.

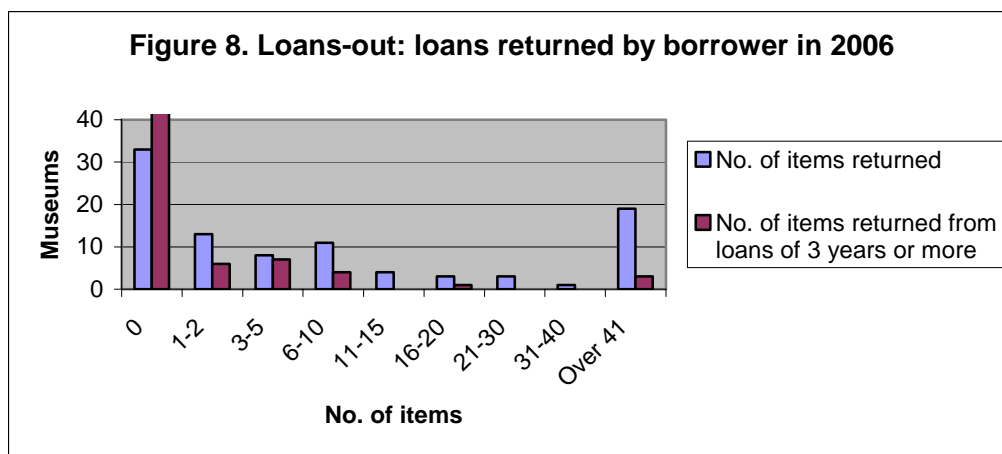


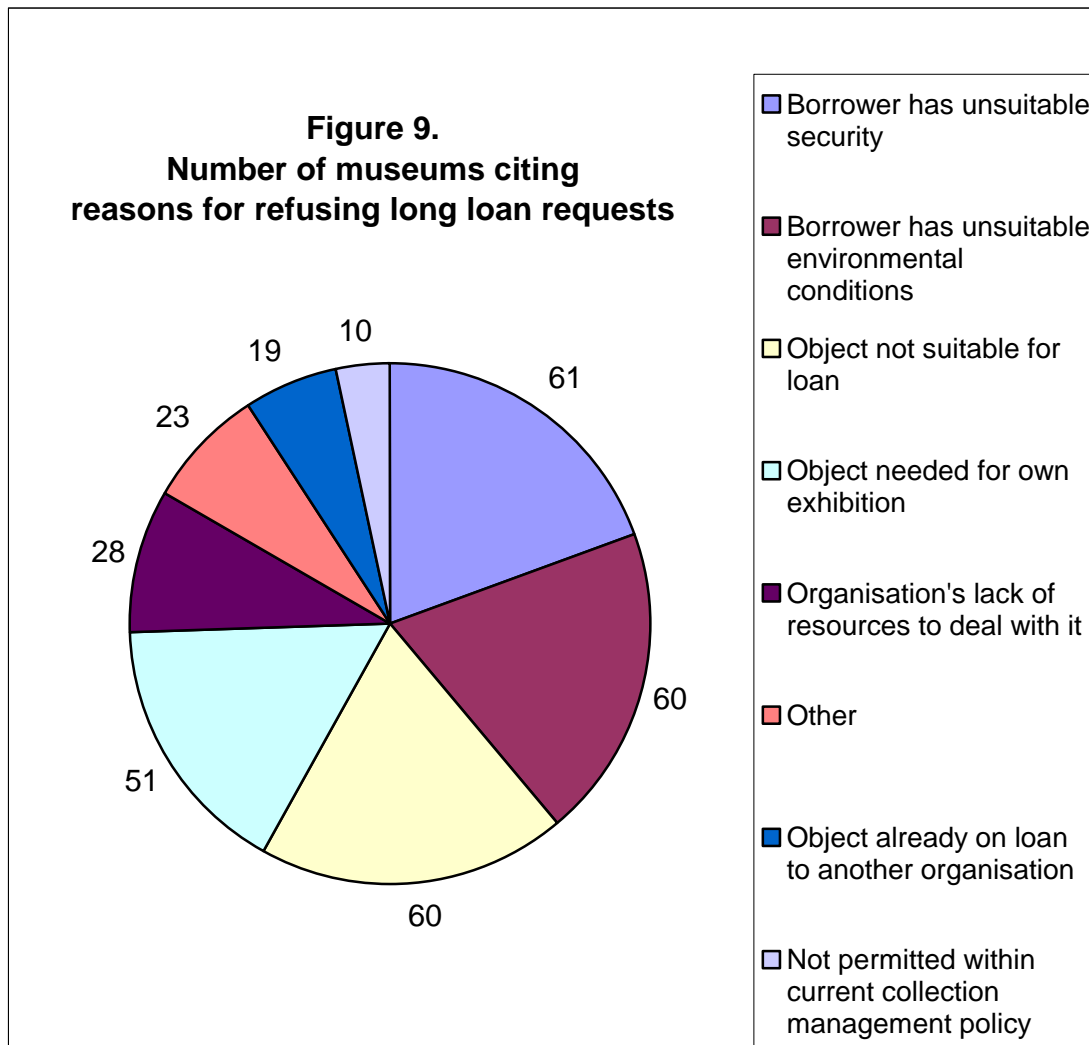
Figure 8 shows that in 2006, over 30 museums had no loans-out returned. Most museums had only a small number of items returned to them, and even fewer long loan items returned. Of those long loans, only 3 museums had over 41 long loan items returned. This reinforces the conclusion that many of the long loans are long standing and are being renewed proactively or passively, rather than returned.

3.6 Refusing long loan requests

Museums gave a number of reasons for turning down long loan requests. The most often reported being that the potential borrower has unsuitable security or environmental conditions; or that the object is unsuitable for loan. This indicates that conditions in the borrowing institution are often a barrier to making a loan, and this could be a significant issue when considering loans of objects for an extended period. Across the types of museums, the most common reasons cited for refusing a loan were as follows:

- local authority and national museums: the potential borrower has unsuitable security

- independent museums: the potential borrower has unsuitable environmental conditions
- university museums: the object was not in a suitable condition for loaning out.



Of the 23 museums that gave 'other reasons' for turning down long loan requests, most indicated they had not had any requests for long loans and so had no reason to turn any down. Others indicated they turned down long loans to non-museum organisations "without proper management"; to non-registered or accredited museums; and to organisations to which in accordance with their existing collections management policies "they were not permitted to lend". One museum gave an example of refusing to extend a long loan. They had a large number of objects loaned to a 5 year touring exhibition, and had refused to extend the loan after this period as the objects would be handled more than originally anticipated when the loan was agreed.

3.7 Long loans to non-museum organisations

About a third of the museums either would make, or have made, loans of three years or more to organisations that were not museums. Some of these loans were to organisations with similar security such as National Trust properties and country houses. A number of the more specialist museum collections had long loans-out to related organisations, e.g. sports museums lending to sporting bodies or military museums lending items to their regiment.

Those reporting that they would make loans of 3 years or more to organisations that were not museums were:

- 14 of 48 (29%) of local authority museums
- 14 of 36 (39%) of independent museums
- 2 of 8 (25%) of university museums
- 5 of 8 (63%) of national museums

Apart from national museums, the other types of museums prefer to make long loans only to other museums. Follow-up calls suggest that the national museums lend to major organisations that are not museums but can achieve the required security and environmental standards, and also lend within partnerships which they have set up with other organisations.

3.8 Loan agreements

The survey shows most loans-out have a written agreement; with 80 out of 102 museums (78%) reporting agreements for all their loans, 14 (14%) reporting agreements for most, and 6 (6%) reporting agreements for some. Only two museums that lent items had no agreements for their loans. Follow-up calls indicated that some of the items without a written agreement are loans that have been loaned from the museum for many years.

In contrast, fewer museums, 44 out of 93 (47%) reported that they had agreements for all their loans-in, 29 (31%) had agreements for most and 18(19%) for some. Only two museums reported that they had no agreements for any of their loans-in.

Table: Numbers of types of museums with loan agreements for all loans

Type of Museum	Loans-out	Loans-in
Local authority	28 of 45 (62%)	22 of 46 (48%)
Independent	37 of 37(100%)	16 of 30 (53%)
University	7 of 8 (88%)	3 of 7 (43%)
National	6 of 8 (75%)	2 of 7 (27%)

78% of museums had written agreements for all their loans-out compared with 47% having agreements for all their loans-in. This indicates that museums are taking a proactive approach to managing their loans-out with written agreements, but that work is required to bring agreements for loans-in up to the same standard.

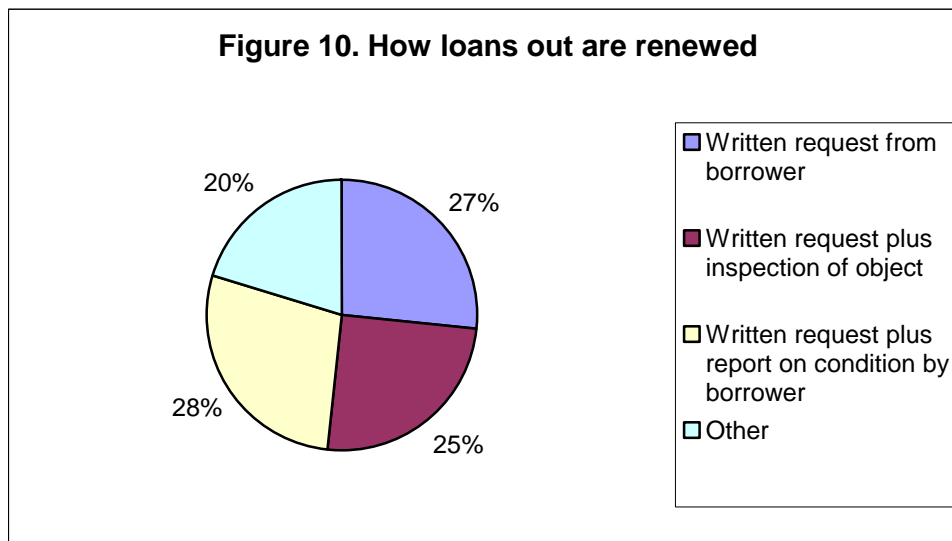
3.9 Processes for reviewing and renewing loans

Over three quarters of the museums across all types indicated that they have a process to regularly review their loans-out, whilst a quarter did not have a process in place. The same proportion reported that they regularly reviewed the loans-in to their museum. There was not a great deal of variation across the types of museum for reviewing loans-in or out.

80% of museums reported that loans-out were renewed in response to a written request from the borrower, perhaps with a condition report as well (see figure 10). Other processes reported were; some loans were renewed automatically provided that the object remained in good condition, some were renewed after annual requests and, in some cases, the lending museum contacted the borrower.

Across the types of museums, the most common method of loan renewal indicated was:

- National museums and university museums required a written request from the borrower plus inspection of the object.
- Local authority museums were equally split between written request from borrower, written request plus inspection of object, and written request plus written report from borrower
- Independent museums favoured written request from borrower.



4. Disposals

The second part of the survey benchmarked disposal activity, processes and procedures.

4.1 Principles and Policy

The vast majority of museums, 101 out of 105 museums (96%), have a collection management policy that includes disposal. However, only 69 museums (62%) in the sample had ever disposed of items from their collections. A number of museums indicated that they were carrying out collection audits which were likely to lead to the disposal of items, and some indicated they had disposed of non-accessioned items which were not formally in their collections. Within the types of museums, those that had disposed of items from the collection were:

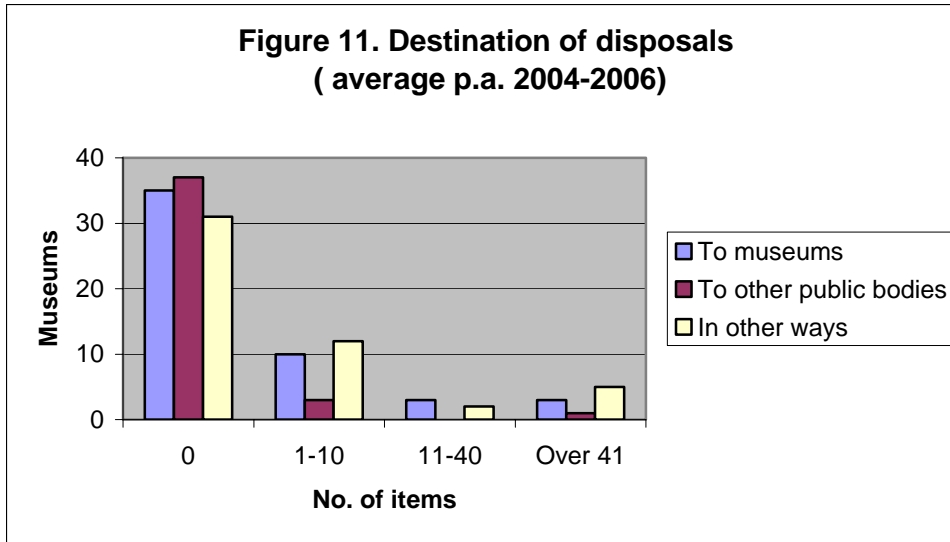
- 27 of 48 (56%) of local authority museums
- 22 of 40 (55%) of independent museums
- 6 of 8 (75%) of university museums
- 7 of 8 (88%) of national museums

There was no trend amongst the types or sizes of museums that were permitted to dispose of items, but had not done so, although this group did include some of the newer museums which may have begun collecting with clearly defined policies. Follow-up calls indicated that a number of museums in Northern Ireland tended to be in this group, as they were of relatively recent foundation and had not yet begun to dispose of items from the collection.

4.2 Number and destination of Disposals

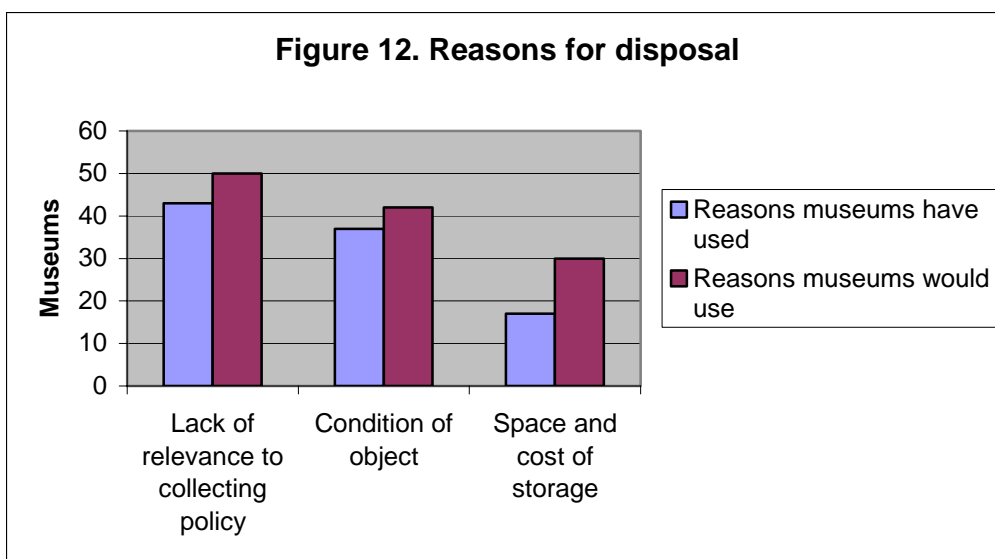
This part of the survey is based on responses from 69 museums which had disposed of items, and so is a smaller sample size than in the previous sections.

Figure 11 shows an average of the disposals made over three years. (The three-year period was chosen to reflect the fact that many museums do not make disposals each year). Over this period many museums had not made any disposals at all, although most of the national museums had made some. 10 museums (16%) had disposed of a small number of items to other museums, with a slightly larger number disposing of items in other ways. Of the museums that reported a large number of disposals, reasons given for the large numbers included the substantial reduction of items in store after the long awaited opening of a new museum, and a review and disposals programme by a museum moving into new stores. Other museums indicated that some items were returned to donors, while objects in very poor condition were scrapped.



4.3 Reasons for disposal

The main reason cited by museums for disposal of items from the collection was lack of relevance to collecting policy (see figure 12). This may indicate that many museums are reviewing their collection to ensure that it reflects the current collecting policy, removing items that were taken into the collection when collecting policies were either not so detailed or non-existent. A number of museums, mainly local authority ones, reported that they are disposing of items in poor condition, and it likely that many of these will not be transferred to other institutions, although some will be transferred to handling collections. An additional reason cited was the return of human remains.

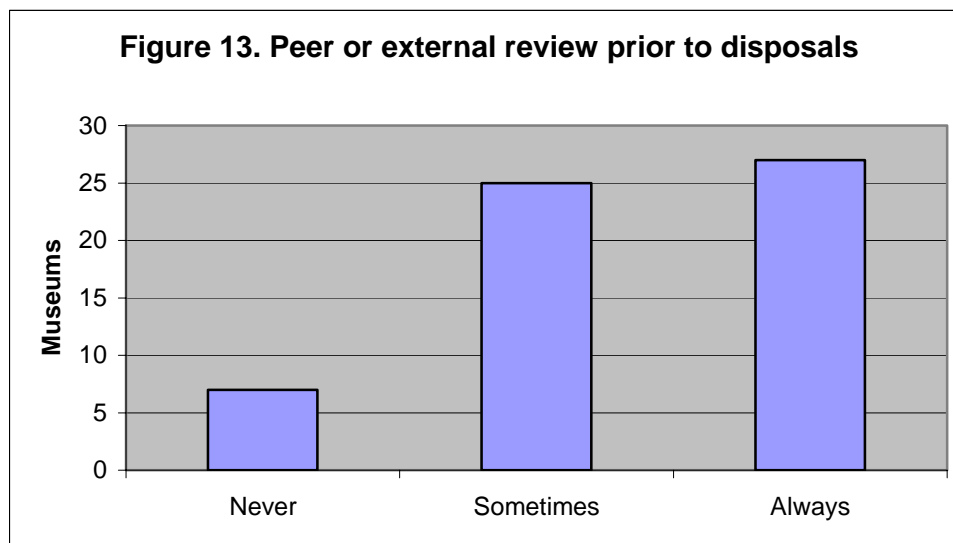


4.4 Peer review or external consultation

27 of 59 museums (46%) that have disposed of items always have external consultation or peer review prior to disposals, with 42% having this sometimes, and 12% never having peer review. Within the types of museums, those indicating 'always' were:

- 10 of 26 (39%) of local authority museums
- 9 of 19 (47%) of independent museums
- 4 of 5 (80%) of university museums
- 2 of 6 (33%) of national museums

It is interesting to note the university museum use of peer review, and this may reflect the use of peer review in academic activity. In the case of the national museums, the lower figure may reflect the use of an internal peer review system. In both cases, however, sample size may be a factor.



4.5 Interest in disposal

The survey indicated that there is a desire to dispose of items from the collections. Three quarters of museums wanted to dispose of more items from their collections, and all the national museums surveyed indicated that they wanted to do this. Amongst the curators that were contacted, there was a willingness to review the current collections and to find a better institution for particular items if that would improve access to them. However, there were concerns expressed about how long and complex the current disposal process was for registered or accredited museums. In some cases items remain in collections, even when curators wish to dispose of them, because no suitable recipient can be identified. Other concerns expressed related to transferring collection items to private ownership before the profession and the public have had more time to consider the long-term implications of this type of disposal.

Appendix 1: Project Methodology

Project Brief: Identify levels of long loan and disposal activity from 100 museums across the UK to establish a benchmark against which the impact of the Effective Collections project can be tested in future.

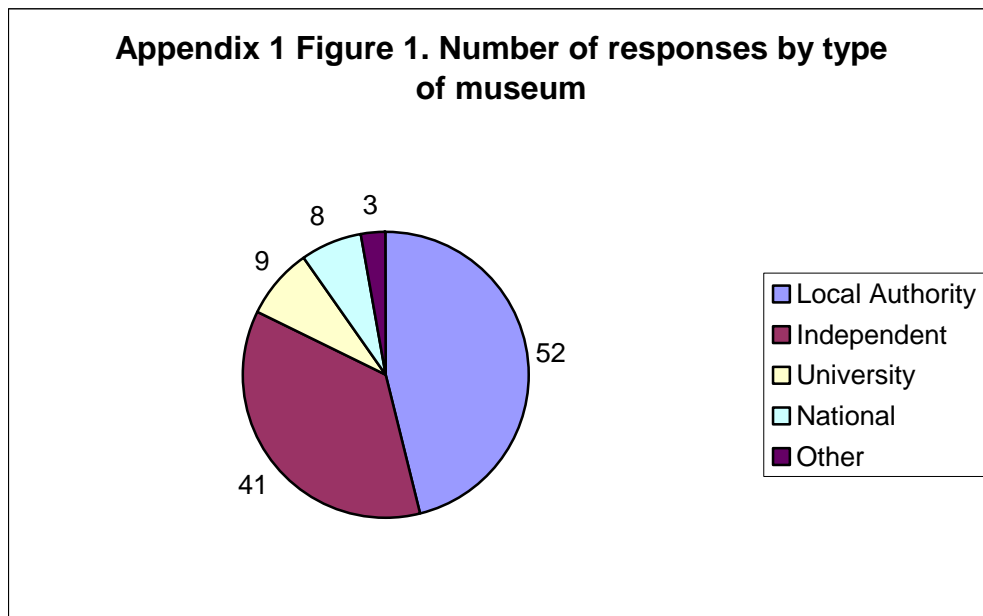
Sample:

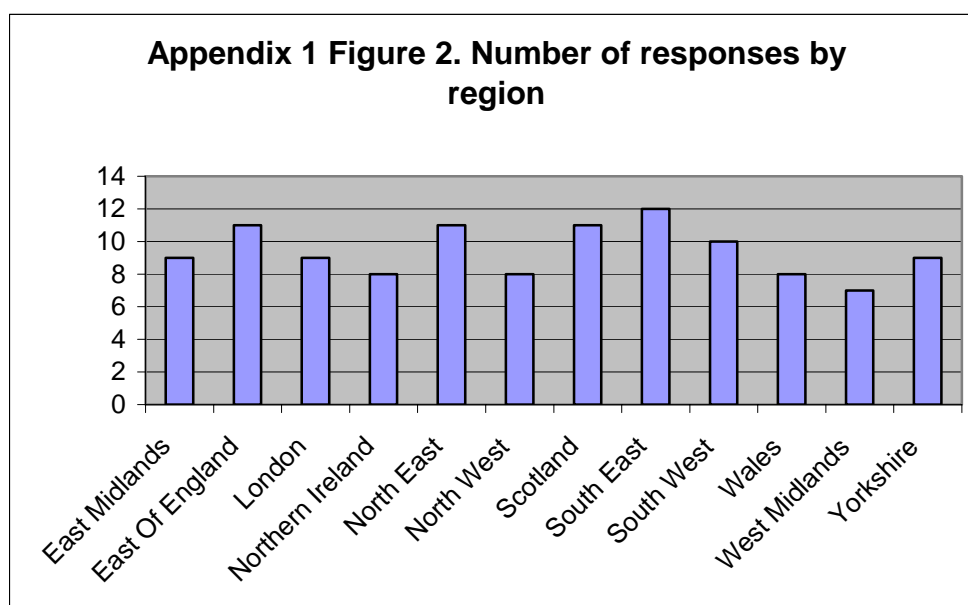
An initial sample of over 230 museums was selected by the consultants with advice from the regional and home countries agencies in order to ensure a spread of types of museums and geographical location across the nine English regions and three Home Countries.

Initial responses were received from 60 museums with a weighting towards the South East. Follow-up reminders and calls to museums in under represented regions, resulted in 113 completed questionnaires with a good geographic spread of 7 or more returns per region. In order to ensure the spread, some smaller museums completed their entry over the phone with the consultant rather than on-line.

The 113 museums in the final sample included responses from the main museum types: National, Local Authority Regional (hub member), Local Authority Regional (non-hub member), Small Local Authority (district/town), University, Independent (large), Independent (volunteer run).

The overall response rate of 49% is good for an on-line questionnaire especially as museums were being requested to complete a number of questionnaires for different organisations during May 2007.





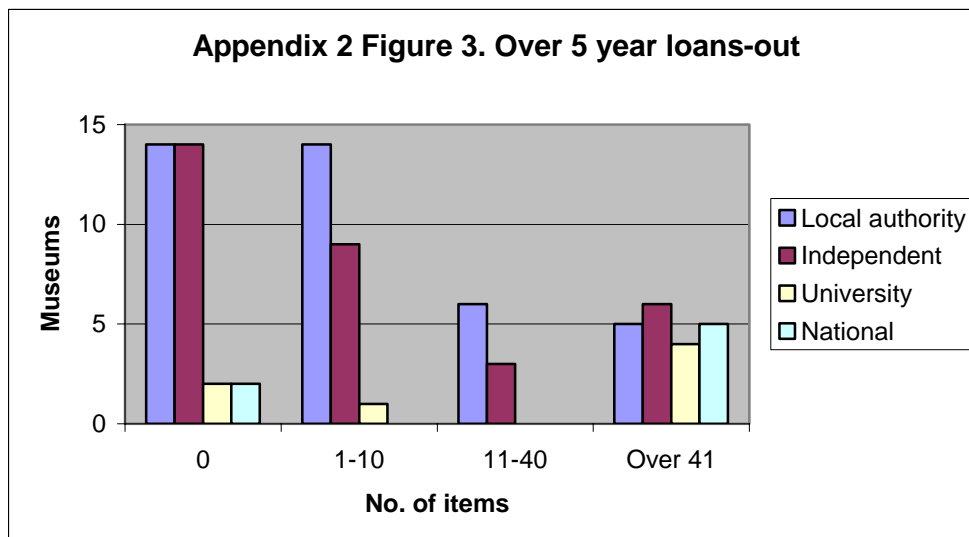
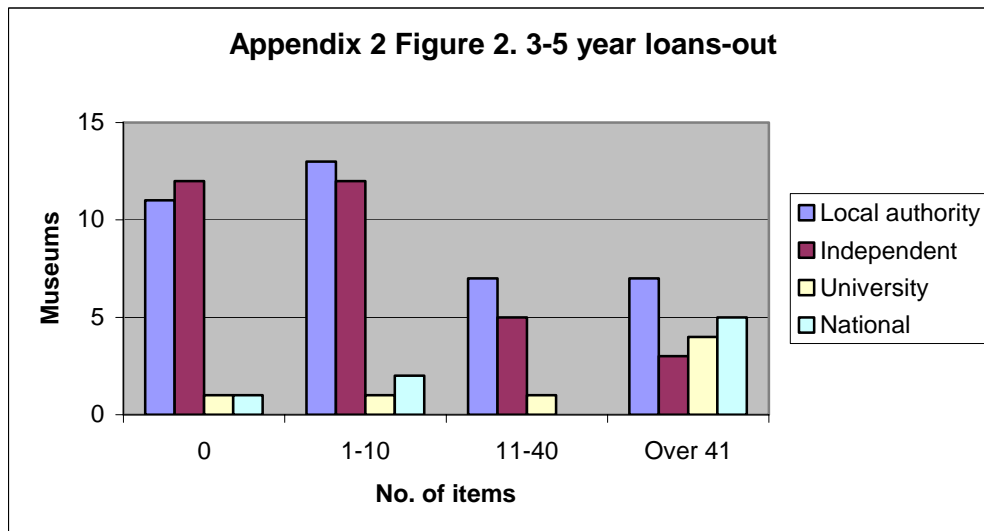
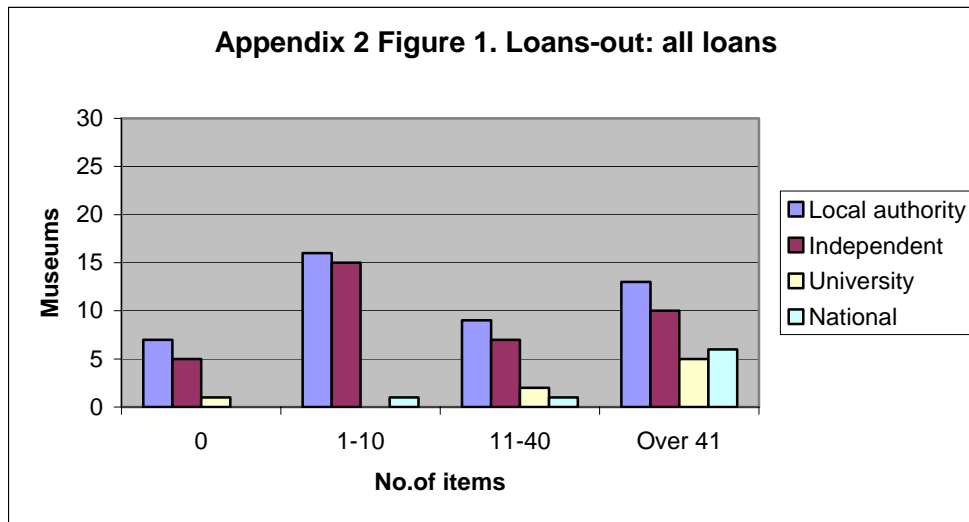
Electronic questionnaire:

The content of the questionnaire was developed by the consultants to meet the brief of the Effective Collections Team to establish a benchmark for loans and disposal activity in UK museums. An early trial stage with a sample of 6 different types of museums established the need for a relatively short questionnaire that could be completed quickly with estimates of activity if hard data on numbers was difficult to retrieve. As a result the survey uses broad ranges that are ticked to indicate estimated levels of activity.

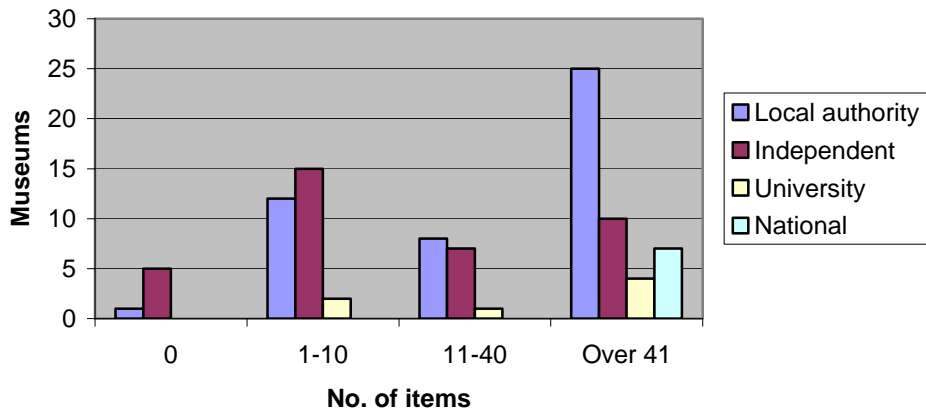
Where a number of museums reported activity beyond the top of a range, such as with the museums reporting over 41 items loaned out, a sample of museums reporting the range were given follow-up calls to clarify absolute levels of activity where possible.

In early May, an email invitation with a link to the online questionnaire was sent to named representatives from the sample of 230 museums, with a request to complete their museums entry by the end of May. This date was extended into June and the 113 entries that have been used to create the benchmark document were completed by 15th June 2007.

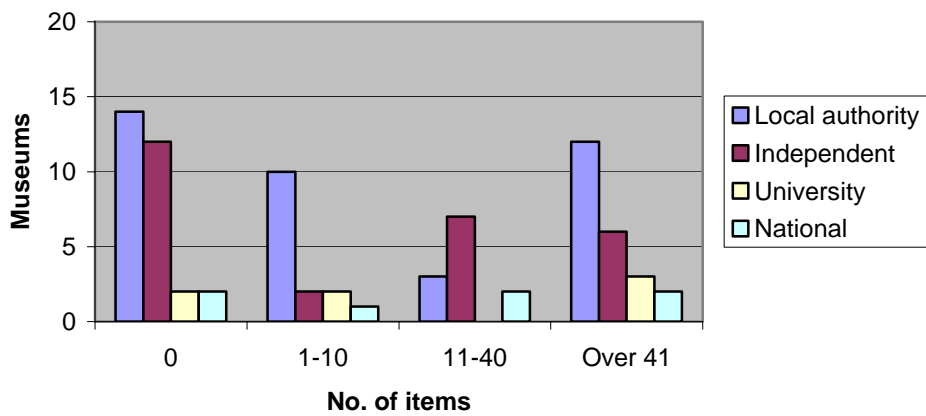
Appendix 2: Number of loans-in and out by museum types



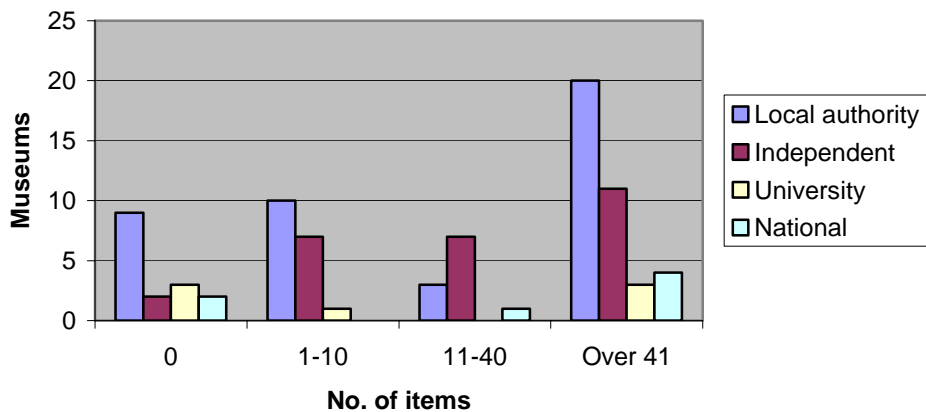
Appendix 2 Figure 4. Loans-in:all loans



Appendix 2 Figure 5. 3-5 year loans-in



Appendix 2 Figure 6. Over 5 year loans-in





**MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION**