

**Miranda STEARN & Liz HIDE**

***The University of Cambridge Museums: Working in partnership to address social and cultural inclusion in one of the UK's most unequal cities***

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**Abstract**

The University of Cambridge Museums consortium (UCM) brings together nine university collections, spanning the arts, humanities and sciences, and varying in size, capacity and aspiration. We are one of the largest groups of university museums in one of the world's leading research universities, as well as being the museum offer for our city and region. Cambridge and the surrounding rural area are amongst the UK's most unequal places. Tackling this inequality gap is a priority for our work. It is the University of Cambridge's mission to contribute society, and our museums, visited by over 1 million people each year, are uniquely placed to do this. By working together, we can play a fuller and more effective role for our diverse stakeholders and communities. This includes contributing to tourism and the local economy, promoting health and wellbeing, helping address inequality, supporting outcomes for children, and opening up the museums and university to a more diverse range of people. We have developed a range of strategies to do this: (i) We undertake audience research to understand who visits and who is excluded, consult directly with non-visitors, and plan audience development approaches accordingly. We use local population data to understand who our under-served communities are, what challenges they face, and what difference we can make; (ii) We invest in specialist staff in learning, inclusion, programming and communications, both within individual museums and in the central team, to co-ordinate joint approaches; (iii) We develop partnerships with local government, schools, health and community partners, and other museums and cultural organisations to deliver work that connects local communities with our collections for mutual benefit. This paper will share examples of these strategies in action across our interdisciplinary partnership and analyse the effectiveness of these approaches to social and cultural inclusion.

**Keywords** : education, inclusion, inequality, social mobility.

## Résumé

Le consortium des Musées de l'Université de Cambridge (UCM) rassemble neuf collections universitaires couvrant les arts, les lettres et les sciences, et qui varient en taille, capacité et aspirations. Nous sommes un des plus grands groupes de musées universitaires offrant des services non seulement pour une université de recherche de renommée mondiale, mais également pour notre ville et notre région. Cambridge et ses environs ruraux sont un des endroits les plus inégalitaires au Royaume-Uni. Réduire et combler ces inégalités est une priorité pour nous. La mission de l'Université de Cambridge est de contribuer au développement de la société, et nos musées, visités par plus d'un million de personnes par an, sont bien placés pour jouer ce rôle. Par un effort conjoint, nous pouvons jouer un rôle plus complet et efficace pour nos divers partenaires et communautés environnantes. Ceci comprend : contribuer au tourisme et à l'économie locale, promouvoir la santé et le bien-être, s'adresser aux inégalités, soutenir les objectifs des enfants, et ouvrir les musées et l'université à un public plus large et varié. Nous avons développé une série de stratégies afin de mieux remplir ce rôle : (i) Nous analysons notre public pour évaluer qui visite et qui ne visite pas, nous consultons également directement les non-visiteurs, et nous développons des approches pour atteindre ce public. Nous utilisons des données sur la population locale afin de savoir quelles sont les communautés en sous-effectifs, à quels défis ils doivent faire face, et comment nous pouvons changer les choses. (ii) Nous investissons dans un personnel spécialisé dans la pédagogie, l'inclusion, la programmation et la communication, aussi bien dans chaque musée que dans l'équipe centrale, afin de coordonner les deux approches. (iii) Nous développons des partenariats avec les municipalités, les écoles, les partenaires santé et communautaires, ainsi que les autres musées et organisations culturelles, afin de livrer un travail qui connecte les communautés locales avec nos collections pour le bien réciproque. Cette présentation donne des exemples de ces stratégies mises en action à travers nos divers partenariats interdisciplinaires et analyse l'efficacité de ces approches en ce qui concerne l'inclusion sociale et culturelle.

**Mots-clés** : éducation, inclusion, inégalité, mobilité sociale.

## 1. The University of Cambridge Museums consortium

The University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) consortium comprises eight public Accredited Museums and the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, which together welcome over 1 million visitors per year. Their collections range across arts, humanities, and sciences<sup>1</sup>. In addition to their public role, they play an important part in international research and student teaching and learning. The UCM consortium's shared vision is to activate the power of the University through its collections, sharing them with its communities and networks to deepen understanding of our world, inspire new thinking, and address local and global challenges. The consortium's structure is heterogeneous, and members must work effectively together to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach to activities, and to maximise impact (HIDE 2014).

A strategic coordinated approach is of particular importance when engaging with public audiences; UCM is the largest and highest profile cultural provider in the city of Cambridge and the region. The breadth and range of collections and expertise across the eight museums and Botanic Garden enable a rich multidisciplinary offer, making connections between the museum collections and responding to audience needs, interests and priorities. Together, the UCM museums are able to deliver high-profile public programmes and targeted interventions on a scale that would not be possible in the smaller individual museums; together, the staff has considerable expertise in museum practice as well as subject specialist knowledge. Collaboration has also enabled the consortium to secure increased investment, most notably Level 3 National Portfolio Organisation status from Arts Council England (ACE). In 2019-20 this accounted for around £1.2 annually as part of a three-year programme.

This collaborative approach has enabled the UCM to successfully advocate for its work within and outside the University and build relationships with key regional and national stakeholders. Most relevant to the consortium's work around social inequality are the excellent working relationships that the UCM has built with Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, the University of Cambridge Admissions Office, and individual schools.

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<sup>1</sup> The University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) comprises: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Kettle's Yard, Museum of Classical Archaeology, The Polar Museum, Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences, Whipple Museum of the History of Science, Zoology Museum and Cambridge University Botanic Garden.

## **2. The Cambridge context: serving an unequal city and region**

Perceptions of Cambridge may be dominated by its reputation as home to a world-leading university and thriving tech industries, but not everyone shares in the city's prosperous economy. Parts of the wider region rank among the most deprived in England (KING & LEEMAN 2019). Cambridge was ranked the most unequal city in the UK in 2017 and 2018 (CENTRE FOR CITIES 2018). Both the city and parts of the region score particularly badly in relation to social mobility.

Social mobility is defined as « breaking the link between an individual's parental background and their opportunities to reach their full potential in terms of income and occupation. It is about better opportunities for each generation and making access to these opportunities fairer, regardless of background. » (BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP AND THE SUTTON TRUST 2017).

Recently, increasing attention has been paid to the unequal distribution of social mobility in the UK and internationally. In some places, growing up poor is highly likely to negatively impact life chances, while elsewhere the negative impact is far less. Within England, the Government's Social Mobility Index ranks local authority areas in terms of social mobility in relation to young people's life stages.

The 2016 Social Mobility Index (SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CHILD POVERTY COMMISSION 2016) noted that « Many of the richest places in England are doing worse for their disadvantaged children than places that are much poorer. » The report specifically named Cambridge as performing relatively badly given its level of deprivation, and identified a high number of areas within the East of England where social mobility is lower than expected given the level of deprivation.

Recognition that the immediate city and region contain some of the worst social mobility cold spots in England alerted the UCM to the urgency of the issue. In order to claim relevance to the lives of young people in the region, we needed to consider museum education activity from the point of view of social mobility, and to understand what contribution could be made to pushing back against inequality of opportunity.

## **3. What role might museums play in supporting social mobility?**

The geographic discrepancies in social mobility are distressing and indeed shaming, but they also offer hope: social mobility can be improved, and the datasets referenced above provide a starting point to identify suitable approaches. Social mobility is discussed in

various contexts, including international research, UK Government research and evidence-based policy documents, third sector research, and culture sector specific research. The UCM drew on a wide range of studies to understand what kinds of interventions might positively impact social mobility. Analysis indicated that the University of Cambridge Museums and museum education departments more generally, deliver a wide range of activities that have the potential to impact positively on social mobility if targeted appropriately – the work of museum educators has something particular to offer in relation to this agenda<sup>2</sup>. Attributes of programmes with the potential to contribute in this area include the following:

### **3.1. Providing high-quality early years experiences**

When gaps in attainment between children from low-income backgrounds and their more affluent peers become established before age five, these gaps remain and grow throughout a child's education. Interventions working with pre-school children have significant potential for lasting impact (BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP AND THE SUTTON TRUST 2017; EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION 2018). Work with pre-school children in museums is currently a vibrant area of practice (HACKETT, HOLMES & MACRAE 2020), and UCM has a number of projects and programmes in this area (NOBLE & WALLIS 2020, WALLIS 2020).

### **3.2. Supporting the development of « soft » and « non-cognitive » skills**

Reduced opportunities to develop skills such as confidence and resilience are seen as one contributing factor potentially holding back pupils from lower-income backgrounds with unequal access to extracurricular activities. Recommendations for addressing this include schools engaging in community partnerships to deliver extracurricular activities, and subsidising trips and extracurricular activities for disadvantaged pupils (BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP AND THE SUTTON TRUST 2017; BAARS, SHAW, MULCAHY & MENZIES 2018; EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION 2018). This suggests that non-school settings such as museums have something distinctive to offer in relation to the development of these skills. The Case Study below explores this through the UCM's programme of strategic partnerships with local schools.

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<sup>2</sup> At a workshop during Group for Education in Museums conference 2018, an informal mapping exercise suggested that museums of all scales were engaged in activity that had the potential to impact on social impact, though many had not necessarily approached it from this perspective: <https://gem.org.uk/training-and-events/gem-conference-2018/reports/> (accessed June 2019).

### **3.3. Raising aspirations, offering insights into employment**

Meaningful work experience opportunities and vocational pathways such as apprenticeships have the potential to contribute to social mobility (BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP AND THE SUTTON TRUST 2017; BAARS, SHAW, MULCAHY & MENZIES 2018). The UK museum sector has been engaging with apprenticeships over the past decade. UCM delivers a range of activities that offer insights into the world of work, supporting varied pathways for young people aged 16+ through their Opening Doors programme with routes to participation in the sector, including volunteering, work experience, traineeships, paid internships, and apprenticeships.

### **3.4. Supporting young people at « transition » stages**

Proactive support for disadvantaged pupils making the transition from primary to secondary school can help guard against negative impacts at this crucial stage (BAARS, SHAW, MULCAHY & MENZIES 2018 AND EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION 2018). The Fitzwilliam Museum has been involved in transition support projects since 2008 (NOBLE 2010), and this remains an important aspect of the UCM's strategic schools work, as outlined in the Case Study below.

### **3.5. Promoting high-quality teaching**

Teacher access to continuing professional development (CPD) is specifically referenced in studies of factors positively impacting social mobility (BAARS, SHAW, MULCAHY & MENZIES 2018). Museums can be well placed to contribute to teacher CPD. At the UCM, CPD is part of the general offer to schools and teachers and is integral to the development of strategic school relationships and initiatives.

### **3. 6. Targeting disadvantaged children, young people, and communities**

The above activities can only make a significant contribution to social equality if they reach disadvantaged children and young people in social mobility cold spots. The UCM targets this work geographically, using social mobility mapping, indices of deprivation, and POLAR4 (Participation of Local Areas) data, which classifies local areas across the UK according to higher education participation rate and demographic data relating to particular school populations. Within schools, collaboration with teachers enables the UCM to focus some activities on the most disadvantaged pupils.

#### **4. Case Study: Strategic School Partnerships**

The UCM has developed strategic partnerships with a number of schools in areas of deprivation and low participation in higher education. The communities they serve experience significant logistical, financial, and attitudinal barriers to access the museums. The UCM establishes long-term relationships with schools, their governing bodies, teachers, pupils, and wider communities through these partnerships. Collaboratively-designed programmes combine a nuanced local understanding of need with evidence for what works, resulting in interventions with a higher likelihood of positively impacting young people's outcomes.

Soham Village College is a secondary school (serving pupils aged 11-18) in a village 17 miles from Cambridge, which since 2011 has been working in partnership with the Fitzwilliam Museum. Teachers and school leaders recognised that despite relative proximity to the city, pupils were highly unlikely to experience the cultural offer of the Cambridge museums except through school. Many families living in the village saw Cambridge, let alone its university museums, as not « for them ».

The initial aspiration was for every pupil to visit the Museum at least once during their time at the school. Joint fundraising took place to cover transport costs, and museum educators and teachers planned together to ensure that visits enriched a variety of curriculum areas rather than acting as a one-off « treat ». Since 2011, almost every pupil attending the school has experienced a visit to the museum. Over time the scope of the partnership was extended to include long-term projects with pupils from low-income backgrounds.

In England, schools receive additional funding, the « Pupil Premium », for each pupil who meets low-income household criteria. Thus, it is relatively straightforward for schools to target interventions to these pupils, and the Premium provides funds to invest in this work. The Museum worked with Year 8 pupils (aged 12-13) on Pupil Premium from Soham Village College to support their learning and engagement in English lessons. Timed to coincide with their first experience of studying Shakespeare, a 10-week programme engaged and enthused young people, enabling them to explore and connect with Shakespeare's world as an alternative to learning about Shakespeare exclusively through studying the text. Visiting the Museum weekly, the pupils worked with museum educators and curators to explore collections, including Elizabethan miniature painting, portraits, armour, and manuscripts, and with other arts practitioners, including musicians playing period instruments and drama practitioners supporting them to perform Shakespeare's words in the Museum. A visit to a University of Cambridge college was also included in the programme, helping demystify university life and encouraging pupils to take an interest in

future career pathways. The project was structured to enable the participants to achieve a Bronze Arts Award, an accredited qualification.

The project has been successfully repeated and adapted, incorporating new collections research, new partnerships, and extending the scope to include visits to UCM collections beyond the Fitzwilliam, for example the Cambridge University Botanic Garden and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Feedback suggests pupils, teachers, and parents all identified positive outcomes: « We were learning about new things in a fun way! » and « I thought it was going to be boring; however, my opinion changed. »

The school's deputy headteacher identified several benefits, including attainment:

« The students have particularly benefited from working on an extended project, bringing together a number of different disciplines and becoming familiar with the Fitzwilliam Museum. The work that they produced was excellent and seeing their pride in completing the award to a high standard was fantastic. Because the project was deliberately centred around Macbeth, which the students are studying in school, we have also seen a positive impact on their English grades. »

While reflections such as these provide valuable insights into the impacts, a more rigorous approach is needed to evidence the impact of this and other work on social mobility. Since 2018, as part of a project run by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (a UK research funding body), the UCM has been refining an evaluation approach based on pre- and post-project questionnaires for pupils and teachers<sup>3</sup>. This enables a close look at pupils' changing attitudes in relation to their confidence in different areas of learning as well as their thoughts and aspirations about future pathways including applying to university.

The partnership with Soham Village College is just one of the UCM's strategic school relationships. Each partnership is developed collaboratively with the school and responsive to their specific needs and priorities. At Cromwell Community College, a secondary school in a rural market town, a similar 10-week Arts Award project supports literacy, but without the specific emphasis on Shakespeare. In 2019 pupils worked with a performance poet to create spoken word responses to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's collection exploring issues relating to climate change, while in 2020 their work explored

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about these evaluation approaches, see <https://www.practicalevaluation.tips/case-study/widening-participation-arts-award-case-study/> (accessed June 2019).



Victorian collections across the museums, adding context to their reading of Charles Dickens within English lessons. At North Cambridge Academy, a secondary school in an area of deprivation within Cambridge city, the partnership programme supports transition from primary to secondary school through enabling every Year 7 (first year secondary) pupil to take part in museum-based activities. Completion of an Arts Award is celebrated at a special event for friends and families at the museum. North Cambridge Academy « Museum Ambassadors » enable the young people to influence the UCM offer, including « takeover days », creating resources for other young people, and hosting events to appeal to their friends and family. Pupils from the school also participate in activities to familiarise themselves with the Museum as a workplace and find out more about future career pathways.

In the future, we will continue refining approaches to measuring impact across these programmes and adapt the programmes as more is understood about what works in the local settings. Partnership with colleagues across the University of Cambridge and other Higher Education Institutions will contribute to longitudinal studies exploring the impact of different kinds of intervention on young people's outcomes and progress<sup>4</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

While a wide variety of museums have the potential to consider the impact of their work in relation to social inclusion and social mobility in particular, this framing can feel particularly pertinent to university museums. Supporting young people to embrace opportunities to learn, discover, be curious, achieve, progress, and make informed decisions about future pathways is one way in which we make a distinctive contribution to our parent institutions' wider missions as seats of learning. In England, public policy and discourse around promoting social mobility clearly relate to more specific concerns around access to higher education for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, with concerns that top-ranking universities are disproportionately populated by students from privileged backgrounds. Higher education providers that wish to charge more than a certain level of tuition fees are required by the Government to set out plans to improve access, student success, and progression among people from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

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<sup>4</sup> The University of Cambridge subscribes to HEAT, the Higher Education Access Tracker, which enables individual pupils' contact with university interventions to be recorded and mapped and their progress tracked, with an emphasis on their progress to higher education. For more information, see <https://heat.ac.uk/> (accessed June 2019).

The University of Cambridge Museums, as the only part of the University routinely visited by over 35.000 school pupils each year, is well placed to make a unique contribution to the University's work to connect with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and support them to progress and achieve - and to use the UCM's developing understanding of what works in relation to social mobility to make these interventions effective. This potential for university museums to contribute to widening participation has become a crucial part of how some university museums and the sector's representative bodies in the United Kingdom advocate for their role within their parent institutions (HIDE 2013).

As evaluation of the UCM's work in relation to social mobility increases in rigour, it is important to be clear about the limitations in measuring and demonstrating impact. For the most part, evaluation relies on measuring immediate, often self-reported impacts (such as an increase in confidence or an improved understanding of pathways to different careers) and then relating these to the wider evidence base around successful interventions. Crucially, museum-based learning activity will only ever be one small factor in a young person's experience, and setting out to mitigate the impact of entrenched, structural inequalities with our programmes can seem daunting and, at worst, naively self-important. By helping supply a sticking plaster to the problem of social mobility, might we also risk being part of that problem, failing to challenge the system that is failing so many young people? A more hopeful approach has been championed in the UK, where since 2013 the Museums Association has advocated for a social activist role for museums, summed up in the slogan « Museums Change Lives » (MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION 2017).

The role of museum educators is informed by a desire to make the best, most relevant difference with the resources available: museum spaces, collections, staff, expertise, and partnerships. By understanding the issues around social mobility, and the evidence around what works to make a difference, the long and extensive experience of delivering museum learning programmes, particularly learning programmes within university museums, can be brought to bear upon this key societal challenge.

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## **Biographical notes**

Liz Hide is the director of the Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences at University of Cambridge (UK). With a background in palaeontology, she has spent more than 20 years working in museums as a curator, consultant and as University of Cambridge Museums Officer, where she enabled the eight university museums and Botanic Garden to work together, collectively increasing their reach and profile. In the Sedgwick, she is keen to enable wider audiences to engage with research and researchers, and for students to gain transferable skills and experience through the museum. She has a particular interest in broadening access to the museum, and developing a greater role for it within the wider community.

Miranda Stearn is head of learning at the Fitzwilliam Museum, part of the University of Cambridge (UK) Museums consortium. She leads a team aiming to deliver a creative, inclusive and impactful learning service to connect as wide an audience as possible with the museum's collections. Making a difference to people has been at the heart of her work over fourteen years in the public sector arts and heritage, at London Borough of Richmond upon Thames arts Service, based at Orleans House Gallery, an accredited museum with a national reputation for its innovative education programmes, and then as a Policy Adviser focusing on Learning and Volunteering at the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund. She has been on the board of the London Museums Group, is on the editorial advisory board for the journal *Engage*, and chairs the University of Cambridge Museums Learning Consultation Group. Miranda has a bachelor and master in history of art, and a PhD from the Courtauld Institute of art, exploring contemporary artist commissions and interventions in historic art collections.