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The following is a transcript of a roundtable discussion on digital innovation hosted by Museums Journal and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of their consultation on future spending priorities. An edited version appeared in the April issue of Museums Journal.

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Museums Journal: The first question is a warm up question: give an example of an inspiring digital online project. I have to say, I really struggled to think of one. Not just a cultural one, any inspiring project, which probably says more about me than it does about inspiring projects. Eventually, on the back of a Jonathan Jones article in the Guardian, I went to look at **Artfinder** and I quite liked it. I liked it for a number of reasons. That it asked questions; it was engaging, so the first random picture it showed me when I did the magical tour asked the question "how does it make you feel?", which made me think about how I felt about that painting. I think it cuts through some of the art snobbery that exists around those online art projects, so I liked it from that point of view as well. Also, as soon as I hit the site, the picture of me that I have on my Facebook site popped up because it has got a social media plug-in, which I am sure is very common but it wowed me.

SUE HOWARD: Well I am heartened to hear that you struggled because so did I. One site that I am particularly interested in, and I am sure many of you will have heard of it, is **TED**. I don't know if you're familiar with TED and **TED Talks**. I think it's a really interesting way of using an online site. It's about broadcasting - you can

dip in there and go to several different interests, and I use it a little bit like I use Radio 4. It might be that you sit down and have your sandwich at lunchtime or occasionally you get time for a 20-minute break, and TED Talks is a fantastic resource. I think the other thing that's quite interesting about it is that, as I understand it - and I haven't been to them - but with the talks, people are now beginning to meet and gather socially around them. From a film and cinema background, cinema and coming together to watch film is about that sense of community and sharing something together, but online can be a very separate, individual experience. The fact that online is then being used to bring a community back together makes it quite interesting.

So I have that one and I also had something else with a company that we're working with at the moment. They're called **Punk Pie/Bright White** in York and they developed a game for the iPhone for the visually impaired. It is called **Aurifi** and, to me, it's about thinking about audiences and exclusion and the fact that, when we sit on a train, everybody's looking at their phone, playing with their phone, etc. But games are excluding lots of people. So this is one that's based on instructional but exciting messages coming through and you get your way through the game. So, Aurifi is great.

FIONA TALBOT: I am like the rest of you. I was struggling to think of anything inspiring and in the end I couldn't. Maybe that says something about the way that I use the internet. But the thing that I thought: "What's had a big impact?" I would say it is getting my iPhone and having the Guardian up on it, because I read so much more. I still read the paper, interestingly enough, but, if I am on a tube, as long as I have downloaded it beforehand I have got it there to read. I find that the most impressive thing, the fact that it is all there on this little – it's not a phone, really, is it? It's a computer. It is very accessible.

ROSS PARRY: In contrast, I struggled to choose so I have got about nine. So, in a cheeky rhetorical way, I am going to say the ones I didn't choose and then the ones I'd like. I wanted to choose **Streetmuseum** by the Museum of London, which allows me to walk through the streets of London, as I did this morning, and pull out objects from the collection as I am on the move. And then the museum becomes part of my life in that particular moment and is aware of where I am and what I am looking at. I wanted

to make a reference to the Experimentarium in Copenhagen's **EGO-TRAP**, a teenage mobile phone project where teenagers can run round the science centre playing an alternative reality game, which is about a conspiracy that's running in the science centre, while the science centre is doing its usual thing.

I also wanted to mention the **Gallo-Roman Museum** in Tongeren in Belgium, which has a smartphone app that gets school kids working together on a hunter-gatherer game while they're looking at quite a traditional and conservative, ethnographic anthropology exhibit, and they've layered this game on the top. I was inclined to talk about **Historypin**, a website like that, which allows you to look at space and maps and explore the temporal and the spatial as well as thinking about cultural objects. I wanted to make a reference to **Tagging Anna**, which is a project that our university is doing where the text of *Anna Karenina* is becoming a site of a collective discussion. So inside the text there are conversations going on and it is not just a Wiki with people adding. It is literally marginalia and notes - if you can imagine a Facebook conversation, but around the text and at different points in the text, which is fantastic.

But the two I will mention that have changed my life, the ones where I say “that's had a profound impact”, and every time I use them I say “that's genius”, they're both outside the sector and one is the **Sky Plus remote control** on my phone, which allows me, wherever I am, to see what's on TV, and if I like it I can hit a button on my phone and my Sky Plus Box back at home records it and records the series. Which is an example of how the technology at home, the hardware at home, the network, the web, the mobile media, can just hook up into something that's seamless and incredibly useful.

The other one, that my kids would want me to mention, is Disney's **Club Penguin**. I don't know if you know about Club Penguin. It is an extraordinary example of an ongoing story, just a wonderfully clear online offer, tying into a shop and a store and toys, but then tying into other games, and - of course it is Disney so it is well financed - but it is just devastatingly clever in the way it wraps up the virtual and the non-virtual.

RHEINALLT FFOSTER JONES: I have got one. It is called **Khan Academy**. The story behind it is that the guy who developed this, Sal, puts on the actual academy itself. His cousin was visiting her family in Boston back in 2004 and she was having trouble with maths. She was in seventh grade and she needed a bit of extra help - she was a bright girl, so she just needed a little bit more. So what he did was think about different ways of doing that at the time, in 2004. There were shared ways of doing it remotely across the States, so he developed the online academy. It was through videos and Yahoo or Google, I think. Anyway, that was the beginning and what happened was that his cousin got the grades she wanted. It was working so he kept it going, and now the other cousins wanted it as well and some of the extended family said “can you help a little bit here?”.

So he has developed this site now that has delivered 44 million lessons, which shows that there is a need. It's a not-for-profit, with the goal of changing education for the better by providing a free world-class education to anyone, anywhere. All the resources are available to anyone. It doesn't matter if they're a student, teacher, home-schooler, principal, adult returning to the classroom after 20 years, or, as he puts it, friendly aliens. The material is available to you completely free of charge. He's publicly funded in that he's got some money from the Gates Foundation and he's been accepted for the '10 in 100' Google competition. And there are now very big donors coming through. That's the one that does inspire me.

GAIL DURBIN: I struggled as well. I think it's very difficult to focus on particular things and I decided to talk about the **Museum with No Frontiers**. You may not be familiar with this but it's a project run from an office in Belgium that works with museums, largely in Europe, to gather up their material and make something from it. One of their last projects was the Islamic Mediterranean, where they got about 13 or 14 countries working together, sharing their information. This was not easy. They started off with Israel and Arabic countries, everybody speaking different languages, and it is all pulled together and they publish books in the language of every country that has participated.

So that's a major issue, and some of these books are now going out of print and that's another issue, because they want to keep these things going. I was very impressed by

the fact that they have now researched and tied into a print-on-demand company, so that they do not have to worry about all the huge setup costs any longer, and on their website you can now order any one of their books from the print-on-demand company. The economics of it are easy if you are just dealing with a black and white book, and they can actually make surplus from this, but not so easy if you're dealing with a full colour book, where actually I think they make no money at all. But I just thought this was a very creative solution to a very particular problem, using the digital world to help out.

JIM RICHARDSON: I think I will go for personalisation within museums and there are two really cool projects I have seen that are doing that now in a simple way. One of them was done during a hack day [an event where developers, designers and people with ideas come together to brainstorm] by two students with the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, where they linked up the **Powerhouse Museum's collection to Facebook**. So you'd log into the Powerhouse's collection with your Facebook identity, and it would look at where you lived and when you were born and deliver you items from their collection that were relevant to you, based on those two things. I think it just creates a more friendly starting point for the collection. You feel like it is personal to you.

And the other, a very similar use of the same technology, was what MoMA [the Museum of Modern Art in New York] did last summer: **Your Summer at MoMA** and **My Summer at MoMA**. Again, you logged in through Facebook and it gave you a program for the day based on your Facebook profile, taking that information and turning it into your tour of MoMA. So both of those things make the museum personal and I think that's really the future.

KAREN BROOKFIELD: Well, I struggled and am just going to own up to not even having a smartphone. So you can tell where I start. But I am going to pick up some of the threads. I'm going to pick up an Australian thread and a community thread, because the thing that, for me, has been inspiring in a personal sense is a site that the Australian libraries have put together, which is now called **Trove**, and is a treasure trove of previously disparate Australian digitised resources. I have been using the newspaper site, where the digitised newspapers are brought together with lots of other

things - images, maps, etc - and you can search across it. But the community element comes in, for me, and I think for the people I share the community with, in being able to find material for my family history research, which is a fairly awful story about one of my relatives in Australia, and follow the newspaper accounts - but also contribute something back, because they've been scanned by OCR [Optical Character Recognition] and they are very poor transcripts. So the community is editing the transcripts of those Australian newspapers. People are doing it for very different reasons. Mine's very personal, other people are doing it because they are passionate about Australian heritage.

KATE ARNOLD-FORSTER: I think I have taken the definition of inspiring in a rather more literal sense as I have chosen an innovation that we are already exploring for its potential to develop the Museum of English Rural Life's digital content and, in fact, is something that somebody else here has picked already - the **Historypin** project.

The reason is that Historypin is being trialled in Reading where I work. This experience has taught me that harnessing existing innovation rather than attempting to innovate on our own is probably the best way forward for many, if not most, museums. By joining together and tracking what the big players like Google are up to, there is a much greater possibility of keeping up with digital innovation and the dramatic pace of changing audience expectations. From what we have seen so far, our hope is that Historypin will enable us to achieve a step change that we would struggle to do without this kind of innovation, by helping us to incorporate geospatial capability - GIS [Geographic Information System] and GPS [Global Positioning System] - into our data and interpretation offer, and hence enabling us to transform the use and reach of our collections beyond the Museum.

Digital strategy

MJ: Thank-you everyone for sharing your examples. What I want to do now is take it from the micro examples to the macro, the big picture, which is, as we discussed with HLF, one of the things we wanted to get out of this discussion. This question of

whether there needs to be an overall strategy. People have worries about creating national strategies for anything, in terms of bureaucracy and time spent and money spent. But I think we need to address the question to begin with, before we can move on to the other stuff. So does anybody want to start off on that question of whether we need an overarching digital strategy for the cultural sector?

KA-F: Can I just ask a pedantic question, which is who do we think is “we” in this context?

MJ: I suppose it is museums, galleries and archives around this table, with some academic and online collections as well.

FT: When I saw this question, the thing that really hit me is that it’s not necessarily about whether we need a strategy, but if we did have a strategy, what expectations would it raise? Because as many people around this table will know, we've had things in the past and there hasn't been any money that has followed. And I think, on something like digital, there would be an expectation that there would be money following the strategy and we're not in a climate any longer where that happens. So I was just going to subvert the question, really, and say: are these the sort of questions we should be asking now or have we just moved into a different political landscape? It may be interesting to debate, but is it actually impractical?

RP: To answer that, I think the other riders and caveats you could put around the question are: who's writing that strategy? Who's maintaining it? Who's enforcing it? Would it be a genuine planning document with teeth, or would it be a kind of charter of aspirations and a vision? Would it be a political document, speaking to government and logically informed by government strategy, or would it be independent from that, and from below? Would it genuinely be a vision of digital culture across the sector - and the sector seems to be film, creative arts, the MLA and so on - or would it actually be just an amalgamation of a series of strategies, all pulled into one? It might be useful to target some of those questions, as we think about yours as well.

SH: And what I would add to that is how do you define digital? What is it that we're actually talking about there? Because I'm sure that if we went around this table, and I

am very glad you didn't ask this question, but if the open question had been “what do you mean by digital?”, you would probably have got seven or eight different answers. So for any strategy, you'd have to have very clear definitions about what was meant by that term. And the fact is that with such rapidly changing technologies, your definition is going to change so quickly as the technologies change as well. How long would that strategy be viable for? Because it is such a rapidly changing environment that we're working in. So it would need to be broken down into the technological, the curatorial, skills, workforce development.

There are all of those aspects to it that we need to think about, and one of the concerns that I am sure we'll come to at some point is that the word digitisation, particularly, in the film archive sector, is seen as a catch-all statement now. At every opportunity, I think we all ought to be responsible for unpicking that and saying “what do you mean by that?”, because we need to be careful that we're not just ploughing ahead when we've all got very different concepts in our minds as to what we really mean.

RF-J: What I'd like to put in, to balance that I suppose, is: what is the risk of not having one? I think we need those definitions and that's part of the process, but we also need to ask what could be gained from the entrepreneurial aspect, innovation, whether there is a methodology that could be approached. I suppose the practical example I could give there would be the Millennium projects. Was there a strategy at that time? If there was, there could be a lot of evidence. There were fantastic projects and material. Some are still about. Others are in a DVD box, somewhere, or CD ROM - some sites have disappeared. So that's all good work, and maybe we can look now with 20/20 hindsight to see if there is a different strategy going forward.

But how then do we keep to certain standards? What's the approach? What's the advice? For the People's Collection in Wales, we had to really distil it down to what could we get everybody to agree upon. We were working across museums, libraries, archives, and the whole people of Wales as well, and things like geography, time, themes, objects - they slow us down. So we just looked at it and said: “Okay, if we're going to do this and map it, then we need to make sure we're not just using some proprietary software that's going to be fine for two years, and what do we do then?” The example I am going to use here is the geolocator - something that Google

developed, which is called GKML; Google KML. Three years ago it became a universal standard called KML, which everybody uses now. So there is a way in the strategy, that it captures methodology as well as the standard.

JR: I think the way we've gone up to now with museums in the sector adopting technology has been led by the audience. So the audience expectation is changing and therefore museums, galleries and archives are changing what they're doing in delivering to customer expectations, as we were talking about earlier. And so I think it's audiences and their expectations that are controlling the speed of change. And we should be looking to answer our audiences' needs, not looking to answer a government directive.

MJ: I couldn't agree more, but that brings us directly to the thorny question of digitisation, because I know in the HLF consultation it says there is a huge public appetite for digital access to heritage materials, and I actually think it's a huge assumption to say that. So I just want to quickly look at this question of digitisation: is that one of the key areas that we need to look at as part of, not a digital strategy, but a future direction?

GD: Yes. I feel very strongly that museums have to take digitisation extremely seriously and I think if we were discussing this in ten years' time, we would think the idea that somehow you didn't quite have to worry about digitisation was just daft. And I think it is no different to filling in record cards, it is just the method has changed now. I think sometimes this argument polarises, very unhelpfully, into: do you digitise or do you do something for your public? That is a very unhelpful way of thinking about it, because if you digitise, you have got a foundation on which to build so many things for your public, and without that foundation you are likely just to be repeating things, doing little bits and pieces here and there and never managing to collect them up. So I would say that getting museum records properly digitised should be a very high priority, even when there are very serious funding issues. And I do not think this is entirely to do with funding. I think it is to do with a state of mind, and that, in a way, you have to go through good times and bad. But your goal, I think, still has to be: get the stuff digitised. Get it digitally recorded so you can use it in the future.

RP: Can I just ask what we mean by “digitally recording it”? Are we talking about making sure that the object record, that card from the manual system, is now on our collection management system? Does that mean we have an image of that object for reference, or that we have a high quality image we can use for marketing it and so on? And within a gallery space, does it mean that one or both of those things are now plumbed into a content management system so they can talk freely to the web? Do we assume that when we say digitisation, we also mean a digital record that will be publicly accessible? I agree with you wholeheartedly, but I think one thing we need to do more often is be really clear what we all mean when we say the “D” word. Is it just making sure that our documentation is now digital or does it mean we have multimedia records around those objects? Or does it mean that it’s out there in the public domain and part of the network? Because there are implications for time and skill and money on all of those.

KB: I actually think you can reconcile those things and that being led by the demand, by the customer need, is the strategic issue. But within that, it also strikes me: is everybody able to enter the conversation? And I think there are some strategic questions there, about whether everyone who has collections, heritage material, whatever format, who wants to meet their customers' needs and feels pressure to keep up - they may feel more pressure than there is sometimes - can everybody get into that conversation? I suspect that we could do with some more thinking about the strategy and how to get the skills, and how we get everyone into that conversation.

KA-F: Well I think the short answer is that an awful lot of the sector is not anywhere close to being part of that conversation. That's why something like Historypin is another route. But like you, I think digital is about everything. It is beyond just being about collections. Everything we do has to have that dimension running through it, from interpretation to outreach. It is not just about capturing and communicating information about collections in the best possible way. But I do really worry that these conversations are only being had among people who sort of understand this. I think there is a risk of being driven by strategy, and by conversations like this, into addressing the needs of, and working with, a rather small bit of the cultural sector, just because they're the only ones who can do this innovative stuff, the ones who've got

the existing platform and are ready to take off in that way. I think you'd be surprised by how many small museums, libraries and archives are just nowhere.

FT: Do you not perhaps think that we should unpick why that is the case?

KA-F: Yes. Well, I do and you probably have a pretty good idea. I mean, do you think I am wrong?

FT: I am not entirely sure I do have the idea as to why. But I just think it is quite a crucial issue, because in terms of where HLF is, it is important for us to know who might be with us and who might not be, but generally for the sector, it is a bad position to be in. If the majority of the sector is just not engaged for one reason or the other, I think we need to know why they're not engaged with this, whether it is resources or vision or...

KA-F: Both.

JR: Time is what you always hear. "We want to do this but we don't have time." But to be frank, the organisations that are doing really well, the people who are keen to do it, aren't just working nine to five, they take a bit of work home with them. If people want to really get ahead, that's what they have to do.

RP: I think if we broke down the answer in terms of museums - I can speak more confidently about that than other parts of the cultural sector - but if we think about our 2,400 museums, 1,700 of those are accredited. So that means there is a group that aren't meeting basic standards that we'd expect in many parts of their provision. So that could present part of the issue. We know that there is a shining group of around 30 that are stunning national museums with talented media teams, that are applying to research councils and generally innovating. We know that, of that other chunk in the middle, there is a large number, four or five hundred local authority museums - and to take our service in Leicester, at the moment it is an organisation where there isn't an IT person in the museum. That expertise is held centrally and the museum works in an

environment where there is neither the expertise in the building, nor the authority, to work with many parts of additional media provision as well.

FT: Yes, although there is a larger body that does.

RP: But it is whether that larger body is thinking about innovation in the museum sector and innovation with culture in the same way that an institution, a national institution that has a team who can really focus and hothouse that. And it can. I guess, at the moment we think about those other chunks. We think about the historic houses, English Heritage and National Trust, which are going through their own challenges at the moment in terms of provision. Certainly a picture starts to emerge of a very large sector that doesn't have the time and the space and the expertise. And it doesn't seem to be the most pressing thing to innovate with digital media.

MJ: Okay, there are lots of people wanting to come in. We will come on to the question of what are the barriers to doing any of this. But I just want to lay to rest the digitisation thing. If we are agreed around the table that digitisation is one of the main things we're going to do, and that should be done, in terms of collections, then does it have to be comprehensive or can it be selective? You must have views on it if you have strong views on digitisation.

SH: Shall I start on that one, in that - and this is from a sector background in film archives - at the moment I think there is a real fear of any sort of mass digitisation project, and again it comes back to what I said before: what do we mean by digitisation? So just for the purpose of this conversation, I am splitting it - I completely agree, Gail, with everything that you said, because you're in a world where you're saying we've got to think about digitisation because this is how we're going to engage with our audiences at the end of it. And if you think about audiences, actually digitisation is much easier to think about.

For us in the film archive sector, we also have to grapple with curatorial issues, but importantly, is it preservation? Then you're talking about something else entirely.

So that's why I keep going back to this: what do we mean by digital strategy? If you're talking about a strategy for preservation, then that's an incredibly difficult thing at the moment when things are changing so rapidly. Mass digitisation, I think, is not where we should be going at the moment, because I think that with pragmatic decisions about funding, as well as everything else, it has to be purposeful. We have to have good curation. Good curation takes time. Digital is a method of delivering it and being opportunist with all the creative ideas that we've got. But that's where it is at the moment. I think if we went down a "digitisation of items for the sake of it" route, then we have to be very careful that what we do not end up with is a locked-down digital collection, just like we've got a locked-down film and analogue collection. We have to be really careful about that. At the moment, I think we're at the stage where we need to ask: what's a really purposeful approach to all of this and how do we build on it?

KA-F: I absolutely agree. It isn't about digitising everything. It is about selecting the things that people need and want to see and also, as anybody who has had experience in this will know, stuff that was digitised ten years ago is quite a good way of testing - some of it is not very good quality digitisation, particularly film and photography, and you have to start to think again. Technology and quality moves on, but also the parts of collections you digitise, so I think we do need to refine our ways of making those kinds of selections.

RP: One thing that I think is a side to this is the issue of copyright. If all this stuff is being digitised, then what? I visited a couple of galleries yesterday - couldn't take pictures in any of them. I work with galleries and if a gallery wants to use one of their pictures on the front of a leaflet, half the time they cannot, and copyright laws really need sorting out. Forget about strategy, lobby the Government.

RF-J: You have just read my mind. Does it mean having to publish it, preserve it, keep it on a database, or what? With the People's Collection, that was a huge issue. We thought, "we cannot do it at all because the price will be terrible and there are all these problems". And then we thought, "well let's have a look at it then", and what we found was that yes, it's difficult in a sense that we're going to be talking to the BBC about bringing their archive in, but we got advice and we saw that, yes, there is risk,

but that is a minimal aspect because we've got the public contributing to the People's Collection as well. What we found was the Creative Archive Licence helped us. What we're finding now is that those small museums, local authorities, they've got issues to think about. So we tend to say to them: "If you're going to spend time doing it, we'll look at clearing the rights as part of the process. What you do from now on is put it forward and make sure you do get the rights", and we give guidance and training as well.

Digital innovation

MJ: Now we're looking at that question; what is digital innovation?, and what are the barriers to digital innovation?

JR: The local authority thing is interesting. I was at Brighton Museum in the last week and they're allowed to have videos on YouTube, but because it is part of the council, they have to be on YouTube with the bin collectors' videos of refuse collection. They do great videos but they're next to the ones for the museum and the council doesn't want them to have a separate channel because there is not enough content there. The museum is saying, "well, our videos aren't quite the same thing as refuse collection". There are some big barriers with local authorities, which I am sure everyone knows.

GD: I think one of the barriers is fear and I think museums have to work very hard to try and shed that fear. They cannot control things once they become digital. It is very difficult. You lose control. And I think you have to try to get yourself in a state of mind where you're prepared to lose some of your power in order to gain so many other things. I think one of the great things you can do with digital is start to get your visitors and their expertise used. But I go to conferences - people have been talking about this for years. But they never do it. And it drives me completely bonkers. Why not? It is so easy, and so easy to start very simply. Even if you have only got a computer and somebody who knows how to work it, your visitors can send you an email or an image and you can do something with it. You do not have to have vast amounts of money. So fear is one of these things and getting yourself into the right

state of mind is very helpful.

ADRIAN FRIEDLI: The experience the Arts Council has had over the last three years of bringing out a digital opportunities programme with arts organisations across England, is that the fear factor is absolutely something that I would recognise. It is kind of allied to a capacity issue, as in, “we cannot begin work out how we would take this on”. And I think both of those relate to the fact that if every organisation, big or small, tries to grapple with these issues on its own, then they will stay locked in fear or worrying about capacity. If there are ways of brokering conversations and relationships, of working together within small groups of organisations or across common issues, then there can be a sharing of knowledge and resources that starts to make these things feasible.

I think the experience of our digital opportunities programme is that we've got arts organisations, anywhere on a spectrum, pushing right at the cutting edge of what's possible with digital technologies, and doing that as part of their daily practice. You won't be surprised to hear that that's a small number of the organisations we work with. Equally, there are a very small number of organisations that have just about got a computer and almost know how to turn it on. The vast majority are firmly in the middle, towards the middle, or just past it. If we can start to encourage a greater sharing and conversation between organisations, then there is far more chance that whatever we do, hopefully in concert with other organisations, will move the majority of organisations further towards the cutting edge of that spectrum.

So I think it is trying to get people out of a very understandable concern about capacity and resources, fear that they might be asking silly questions or do not even know what questions to ask. You can get out of that if you start talking to people, because a lot of them will share exactly the same concerns.

MJ: It strikes me there are two different types of fear, aren't there? There is the fear of the unknown: “We do not know how to do this. We cannot possibly even begin, it's such a big task.” And the fear that you talked about, the fear of losing curatorial control: “These are our objects and we cannot possibly have a member of the public

commenting online or sharing their stories.”

KA-F: There's sustainability, which I think we all worry about, and then there is the trade off between doing kind of bread-and-butter stuff that you have to do to keep the show on the road, against doing something innovative and new which may or may not work. Maybe it is the wrong way to look at it, but I think most of us feel we've still got to keep cataloguing those objects and getting the basic records up.

RP: To add to the growing list, as well as the fear and the other things, I'd add history. There is a very long professional culture still in our DNA that says we are venues with physical objects that people come to visit, and there are curated exhibits - but the offer of the last 15 to 20 years from digital networks has been of information or media objects being co-curated, and museums joining a conversation or contributing to a wider network of voices and sites. It is an entirely different paradigm. It is an obvious point, but still, we can now see the opportunities that this new paradigm presents and there are many institutions that are redefining themselves and adapting what a museum is in the 21st century. But [the traditional view of what museums are] is still there. It is there in our curricula. It is there in our accreditation. It is there in our professional ethics. It is there in our professional language. So [the new digital paradigm] is still not a natural place and a natural thing to do.

And I'd add two other barriers as well. I think there is a lack of proactive brokering. That's another reason why there is a barrier to innovation; that you have a great idea, you have the skills and you have the time to do it, and there is a university partner who would love to get involved to do some research around it, but do we all know about it? There isn't too much research and development, or too many research projects, which Karen [Brookfield] and I hear about when we go to those conferences. That can come down to serendipity: that person met this person and they thought, “we could work together on this”. In 45 minutes time, when we really start talking about the detail and what a strategy might have, I hope that active, intelligent brokering, which brings people together, could be a really key part to creating innovation.

KA-F: We've all been victims of bad brokering in the past. The drive to encourage and incentivise partnerships can sometimes distort the focus of project objectives. Being mindful of these pitfalls is important.

MJ: I think it is really useful to keep going on the fear factors and things that prevent us from doing it, because only by expressing these can we start breaking down some of those barriers.

SH: I had a slight moment's hesitation because I thought we were on the innovation question, and it is from that question that we almost consciously went to the barriers to innovation. I thought it was quite interesting that we did that. I think, in terms of innovation as well, that I must just have a very boxed brain inside here, because I also divide [the question] into different areas around digitisation. And so I think that innovation should not necessarily be the creative access side of it all. But there has to be an awful lot of joined-up thinking about how we use the technologies behind it all, particularly within the world of film. If we can innovate so that we get the standards to digitise that we want, that work across the sector, then that's fantastic. In terms of the productions and the technologies, that's innovation. It won't be seen by our audience and that's great because that's the best way. It shouldn't be seen. It should just happen. If we could get some investment into that sort of information as well, then fantastic.

RF-J: I was just going to touch on the innovation side and the studies that have been put towards seeing that it is down to good leadership, allowing good ideas to come into the organisation and be implemented. About 30% of the population are creatives in the sense of thinking of ideas. And so it is about harnessing that process. It brings us into the fear we went through with the People's Collection in Wales. I suppose that what we tried to do is, instead of putting the intellect and time of lots of people, very intelligent people, towards the hundred reasons why not to do it, we thought, "what could be done with it".

One practical element we had was moderation [of content]. Because of what we were bringing into the People's Collection in Wales: we could not call it the "people's

collection” without having people to contribute. So moderation - what would happen when we open the digital gates of the People's Collection in Wales? It could be inundated with all kinds of materials. We invested a lot of time and money to develop a moderation system that is federated, that allows this to be done, and the initial part is that we didn't have much to benchmark by, but the initial fears were very much that we're going to have thousands of pornographic images pouring through every day. We've had one swear word.

It is a practical example. We had to go through the process to mediate that, buy-in the stake holders and also - it might be just one word, but this has backing from the Welsh cultural minister and of course anything that goes through there would reflect badly on him. But it is ensuring that the end result is worth it and there is a mitigation of the risk and the end result means that you can link to audiences.

KB: I was just going to observe that maybe in formulating our question, if we're not careful, we're beginning to equate digital innovation with people just thinking of the technology, just thinking of what they do with it. Naturally what's coming out is that it may be very different things, and innovation for one organisation is not necessarily for another. But I do think that we also wanted people to think about the fact that it is linked to a culture of whether we take risk or not, and perhaps on a small scale within an organisation, people doing things around the edge of their day job and having a go at something. I am sure there are lessons from previous initiatives in the sector where we should look and think: “Did we weigh up the risks sufficiently? Did we perhaps make the right judgment? What can we learn?” If we can try and get that conversation going it would be very helpful to all of us, rather than feeling that either innovation isn't happening at all, which is clearly not true, or that it needs a lot of money, which probably isn't true either.

JR: I think one of the big things in terms of innovation is that digital media allows collaboration and that can mean that you need very little money. It can bring people together across the sector to use the power that we've got from having so many institutions and so many fans or followers of those institutions. When those organisations come together, it can have a really big effect. Some of the stuff that we've done in terms of Twitter has brought together hundreds of museums from

around the world to work together. It has brought attention to the sector from people who might have been thinking about museums that day, and it takes no money. It takes an idea and some people to spend a tiny amount of time each doing it, and the effect is massive.

AF: I think it is absolutely right that it is difficult almost to conceive of a serious programme of innovation where you're not taking risks, and in the current climate that's obviously challenging. But if there is an approach right from the start that you take on those risks and try new things, then whether or not they succeed or fail in their own terms, if the learning that takes place across the course of project is available and shared, so that not just the organisation involved is able to benefit from it, then everyone moves forward, however incrementally, as a result of those risks. Again, it is about sharing and therefore mitigating the risk to a degree. Because if organisations know that if they're going to try something new and challenging for them and that they can learn from what other organisations are doing, it means that everybody doesn't have to take a risk around every aspect of the issues you're exploring, and that the huge and unreasonable pressure on people to succeed at everything they take on is lessened to a degree, because it is acceptable not to succeed in the terms of the project itself. Because you might find out hugely valuable things for you and others by asking those questions.

MJ: I think that's a really interesting point: has there been any meaningful evaluation of previous projects, online projects, digital projects, that has been shared in the way that you describe? Because there has been a lot of money and plenty of projects. Has that evaluation taken place? Is it in the public domain? Has it been shared? Have the lessons been learned?

RP: Yes, there are formal evaluations, whether it is the University of Edinburgh report on the National Museums Online Learning Project [2006-09], which brought together nine national museums, including the V&A, to create creative spaces, and the success of that project was the fact that nine national museums worked together and were able to produce this online content and to think through a whole number of things. There have been formal reports on Culture Online [a 2002-07 initiative which commissioned interactive projects within the cultural sector]. These have been our

attempts to step back from it. We have had these reports formally deposited in the public domain and they are our formal evaluations of these projects. But sitting next to those are the academic papers that have been written and we just need to look through the last 13 years' worth of online proceedings for the Museums and the Web conference and you will find hundreds of papers there, written by practitioners and academics and others, where they're reflecting upon what we did and what we learned. That repository is there, that conversation is taking place.

Then there is a third place, which is the live conversation. It is going to the Museums Computer Group. It is going to Museum 2.0 with Nina Simon [a blog exploring how web 2.0 philosophies can be applied to museum design]. It is going to Museum3 with Lynda Kelly [a social network and not-for-profit organisation exploring the future of the cultural institution sector]. It is going to the Archives and Museum Informatics social networking site and hearing and being part of an ongoing conversation where practitioners are saying: "We couldn't do this, who made this work, can anyone give me a reference?"

MJ: But isn't the problem that most people are not involved in the conversation? They're not on those sites; they're not reading those papers.

RP: But making available where that evidence base is. Where is that proof of concept? Where is that demonstration? Where is that corpus of material that says they did it and you can? And these people did it over the last five years and it hasn't worked but now all you need to do is to stick a QR [Quick Response] code on the corner of your label and it works. So you do not need to go through that journey - this is the bookshelf of material that shows you how you can do it. We're really good at doing that in museum education. Gail [Durbin] wrote a book for GEM [Group for Education in Museums] that pulled it all together: look, these are the theories, these are the ways of working, here's the manual, it can work. We haven't done that with digital.

I think - it sounds trite and a hackneyed phrase - but we need to get better at sharing best practice. We need to get better at showing what works and sharing what works. I

have to say that a footnote to this for me is - I am hesitating to say it because it is sometimes not a fashionable thing to say - but: are we more competitive as a sector than we might admit? In terms of museums wanting to share, in terms of rivalries, in terms of one university competing against another, in terms of, at the moment, museums competing for Core status, in terms of national museums vying for visitors and vying for prestige and so on. It is a conversation we do not have, but: are we more competitive than we might admit? Which is not conducive to everything we've just said.

JR: I don't think that museums are [more competitive]. I am working on a book at the minute about the social media element of digital stuff, but when I say to people, "can I come and speak to you about this book?", everyone says yes. They want to help. They want what they're doing to be known about. Nina [Simon's] book has been out there. People just need to actually go and read this stuff and Nina's book was in your magazine [MJ]. The information is there. People just have to go and get it.

MJ: People do want that manual that they can pull off the shelf. All the Museums Association's market research shows that what our members want is best practice information and advice in one source, so they can get it online as a searchable resource and put the terms in. But you have to know the terms in the first place.

RP: One important step that's happened in the last couple of years is what Collections Link has done in the context of collections management and documentation, the strapline of "just practical advice", a website you can go to and just say, in a very natural voice, "how do I fill in that record? Deal with a loans request? Overcome an issue of copyright?", and it is just there. And I think what's been interesting with the Collections Trust is that the digital element is there. There is a model for what could exist.

JR: I was just going to say, do the organisations have to have that knowledge in their core team or could they get volunteers to help them. So, you have volunteers who help in a lot of aspects of museums, you have digital volunteers who can help with those skills which museums do not have.

KB: Ross touched on looking back at where museum education was in the mid 90s and I wonder if there are also lessons about getting something into the mainstream of the organisation as well. We've touched a couple of times on leadership and why we're doing something in terms of a business objective and just reflecting for a moment about whether there is an element of actually sometimes having to slow down, because what you can do, what you can do with the technology, what you can do with the people, what you can do in the partnerships, asking that question about why you're doing it, as well as just it will be fun, we can do it. Is it embedded? I might be reflecting slightly because at the conference earlier in the week on mobile in the cultural sector, lots of practitioners were saying I feel I have to do this because my chief executive wants us to, whether it is a local authority or a very large organisation, or the trustees expect it. Now, thinking in that sense about innovation, which is really getting it rooted in what you're trying to achieve, but it is very tempting to go off and do all of those things and to meet all those stakeholders' expectations.

MJ: I think that's a really good point. Maybe we can move on to this question of who are we doing it for? Why are we doing it, related to the purpose and aims of the organisation. Has anybody got any reflections on that?

SH: Well, I can just speak from a very organisational point of view on that. As a small organisation, we've tried to do exactly what you're saying, Karen. Jim will probably be horrified at this but, you know, there is no Facebook link on Yorkshire Film Archive or YFA Online. There is no Twitter. Because we need to just think about why – what is it that we're going to do? How are we going to use that effectively and what is it that we're trying to say when we do that? I do think that as organisations, sometimes we do just need to stop and reflect a little bit and there never seems to be the time to do that these days and that's partly funding driven, but it is also partly, as you say, competitive and needing to keep up with the massive, massive change of pace in the digital technologies that we're all experiencing. So, there is very little time, these days, to stop and reflect about these things.

But, of course, the other thing for a small organisation is that whatever our web sites or our online offers are, there is also an assumption that we just put that little icon on and get our Facebook going. It takes time. There has to be somebody at the other end

doing it and we have to keep up with it and if we're not smart about how we communicate and have those conversations, then it very quickly dies and that's a fear for me and that's one of the fears that I probably need to get over or allocate resource to make sure that when we do it, we do it well and we embed it in part of our practice as an organisation, rather than adding an icon, because I think people think "where's your icon?"

JR: That sounds sensible. Too many people jump in without thinking it through.

KA-F: It has taken five years to argue for the internal investment, nobody external would fund it, for the upgrading of our system. We have half a million records and, you know, just in this last few weeks we're finally, finally getting this through. It is not something to shout about. In a way I feel rather ashamed and I feel bad that we're still having to do that and this is just simply moving our digital records on to the kind of right generation of system and now we may have a little moment of opportunity where we can put our head above the parapet and start to engage in all of this.

But in a way, that big huge thing is really, really the big achievement. Because nobody is offering you exciting rewards for doing that or funding for doing that and just every local authority and museum in the country will also be having that battle. I completely understand why it has not been a priority for HLF to fund that kind of thing or anybody else. But you're absolutely right and, you know, it is not just tiny organisations, really big one resource ones are doing that too.

GD: I sympathise with the issue of do you have the resource to keep Facebook conversation going if that's what you want to do. But I do think that with many of these digital things, the only way to find out about them is to do it and that unless you're prepared to sign up for Twitter, maybe just use it yourself or open your Facebook account, you cannot see the potential. It is not something you can do in theory. So I would very strongly advocate that museums do not spend ages thinking about it, that they just do something small. I mean, do not be over ambitious but just get in there and try it. Because once you have done that, you will have opinions and ideas.

RF-J: The approach by us, is the question of who are you doing it for. What we try to do is break it down into what's called a ladder of participation. It breaks it down to the overall usage of the site. So, I think 52 percent are inactive and so, in a sense of not actually engaging much in the use of the web at all. But then right at the top you have the very actives who are blogging, tweeting, got their own page and everything else. And then you have got the in betweens, but it is defining them and that's what we're trying to do.

So, there is an actual digital strategy for Wales, not just the sector, but overall, So, a better approach is engagement for our key audiences, to actually gain some skills. So, we're saying great, maybe that's the driver and maybe there is some investment comes with that as well. So, we're seeing that we've got something called 'Communities 2.0', which is a digital initiative and that's trying to get people from different demographics involved.

What we're trying to do is not just measure how many visits it gets, which we have to do and we are doing, but also trying to say how many people did we progress on the ladder of participation. So, what we're seeing, the majority of people that actually use the site, they are mainly consuming, you know, viewing it, reading it, enjoying it and so forth. We're seeing now how they go up and say bring a comment. So, that's why we need to spend time on who we're doing it for, looking at audiences but within it as well to make a more three dimensional audience structure to it as well. Things are going to get very, very much faster, not just through the technology. It is going to mean quite good opportunities as well. So it means that the technology and connectivity could happen. The example would be the adoption of the telephone landline, it took 50 years for it to become well known and used as a household object. Mobile phone was seven years. For the future, we can see that the up take of new innovation will be higher.

RP: I was going to add a comment about how it is changing in as much as, yes it is the audience's expectations and media literacy and technology at home and the media they have around them and interactive white boards in Key Stage One classrooms and so on. But it is also to do with the practitioners as well. I have got a great job because every day I get to sit with a whole year's worth of bright post graduates who are

beginning their careers and they all want your jobs and they are naturally immersed in this world. We're not quite teaching millennials yet but we are in the next few years. We're going to start with the 22 year olds that I will be standing in front of and they won't know anything but the web in their formal education and that's an interesting tipping point. We had a group of a dozen Masters students, in three and a half hours, put together a QR code application and it was fun and it was perfectly normal for them and it was very easy to do.

The sort of ideas that our students are coming up with, with their exhibition designs and practical project they've been doing over the last few months, digital's embedded. It is not other. They do not use the word innovation. They'll snigger at the fact that we keep going on about digital innovation. There is just education. There is just marketing. There is just good collections management. There is just being a good communication in a museum. Maybe we're not talking about innovation here. Maybe we're just talking about digital practice and innovation is an unhelpful term because it makes us feel that we're racing and trying to follow a kind of leading edge that's always out of reach.

KA-F: Can I just add one thing, I am just slightly scared, sitting here, as somebody who might be wanting to access a lovely opportunity to digitally innovate, that you would be asking me questions about audiences. Museum people do know quite a lot, now, about the kind of people who come in the door and but the mismatch between that and what you're talking about with the reach of digital is an area that we would want you to help us understand a bit more.

MJ: Yes, I did want to ask a question around that, which is about how much we know what audiences want. Do we know what our audiences want?

KA-F: Well I think possibly we do not.

JR: Yes, there is good research; it says that there is the shift that we're talking about that people are active on these networks. Do they want museums to come and be their friend on the networks? Well, maybe not, but they're active on them, yes.

AF: Yes, there is research that we've commissioned into public behaviours and use of media and, within that, what appetite or indeed demand might there be for better, greater, cultural provision and there is a pretty clear message saying that it could certainly be better and it would be welcomed if it was there and that there would be an appetite for people pursuing it.

Why would we think that the areas that we're interested in would be, somehow, completely separate from how people live the rest of their lives. I think the point about if we can stop trying to isolate digital as something special and just regard it as stuff, it is just stuff. Actually the stuff around digital technology is not about the technology, it is about how people use the technology. Most people whose business and interest is in developing technology, rarely predict how they're, in fact, going to be used. They are socially shaped by how they're then adopted.

The best ones, in technical terms, as is well known, do not always triumph. So we have the VHS or we had, rather, VHS players and old Beta Max. So, it is how technologies are used and, ultimately, it goes back to the question of well what are people, what are organisations trying to do? They're trying to bring the content that they hold or the activity that they are passionate about to audiences, to other people. What technology increasingly is making possible is new and inspiring ways that that can be achieved.

FT: I agree with what I think people are starting to say, which is that it is about the seamlessness between digital and the real world. If we all think about the way that we use digital ourselves, that is the way that things are. But actually it was just as you were talking there, Adrian, about it was almost like saying we have the stuff there and they will come. And as a funder, that's quite a difficult question for us, because we cannot just fund everything or anything, we have to have some sort of framework within which we do it and we obviously have limitations of money. And so I cannot quite resolve that at the moment as to how we deal with that as a funder.

I thought that what Adrian was saying was if it is there, people will access it. It is not the way that you would, perhaps, do an exhibition and think what your target audience is.

It would be more a case of we have that stuff available digitally and somebody will use it. Lots of people might use it or not many people will use it, but it will get used in some sort of way. And I am saying, as a funder, we obviously have to have some lines drawn somewhere because we cannot fund everything. And so we would expect an organisation to say to us, well we're doing this project and we're digitising this material because we are reaching X, Y and Z, which is your point, isn't it?

RP: Jim and Gail will be able to say much more about this in a formal way than me, but there is a big shift that we're going through in a moment which is that we realise it is not about building museum websites and big databases and waiting for people to rock up and start searching on them, it is about making sure that content is out there and some of our audiences may not notice or care whether it is museum content, it is just that great, rich, trusted informed usable content that was there when they needed it and they didn't need to know the URL and domain name of your museum and they know where your search engine is and put in the right key terms and work through the records until they find what they want. And the content's web-shaped. It is not object-record shaped and it is usable. But that's what our model is becoming. So, it is not building these huge monolithic museum websites and waiting for people to come to them, but actually to go out to where people are on the web.

SH: But isn't this so much wider than these tiny sectors that we work in as well and it seems to me that the debate that you were just having there, if you look at the newspaper, the media sector, and you look on the one hand at the Guardian approach to its online material and you look at the other end at the Times approach, the Guardian puts everything out there, and at the Times: if you want to know more about that, subscribe now. That's about how they are in the online world that they work for but we're all having to think about all these stages. So, this isn't something that's just happening within our sectors. I think it is about dropping the word "digital" because it is just the world that we're in. It'd be interesting to know, on a financial basis, which one of those media models succeeds one is about really understanding, who the audiences are and the other one's more about saying we know who our main audience is and we think we can do it that way.

GD: I was just thinking that some of the things that Ross was saying sound a bit scary and getting it out there in the digital world is actually not easy and it absolutely isn't what the average museum can cope with very well. I think that's a really tricky thing to do. And I wouldn't be spending too much time worrying about that. I think it is an extremely interesting area and we have created it now and our database of our one million however many objects is available for anybody to access and use for their own purposes, but that's the more advanced end of digital activity and my feeling is that for most museums signing up for Facebook or Twitter might just be the better end to start.

AF: Yes, just to follow up on that, we've been talking to other organisations the **YouView** project is very interested in how the arts sector could get all of its content onto You View because, of course, if you create a platform like YouView, what you desperately need is content. Otherwise why would anyone go to it? And we have very quickly established that the vast majority of the organisations that we work with have content and this is kind of going all the way back to the digitisation question at the beginning, they have content but do they have it in a form that, even if they wanted to, they could make available through this new platform, YouView? Probably not.

But I think that the ways in which audiences reach organisations and what they do are many and various and what we've argued strongly with the organisations that we work with that they need to address is that if you're not present in this digital arena at all, that is a problem because you will increasingly be invisible. You will, and as new generations come on stream, increasingly so, you will struggle to engage with the audiences that I think are the reason why most people do the work that they do.

How you are visible, to what extent you are visible and in what ways you engage with the web or with digital technologies can be many and various and can suit the scale of the organisation and its own capacities. But getting everyone, or the vast majority of people actually plugged in, I think is almost the first step. The other things will then follow, because if people are plugged in then they'll start to ask people the questions about how they can move on from where they are and then you start to make progress.