



**University of Brighton**

**Behind the Scenes at the Museum:  
the why and the wherefore  
Project Report  
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# Behind the Scenes at the Museum: the why and the wherefore

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## **Executive summary**

### **Benefits of the behind the scenes access for Design students**

- Broadens students' vision of art and design culture
- Allows a process of surprise and self-discovery, and contributes to the development of the student as an independent researcher
- Provides an alternative arena for engagement with objects and curatorial expertise
- Gives students freedom to make their own meanings
- Possibly provides handling opportunities but, even if not, the chance to get close to objects
- Allows students to consider different contexts and develop a tacit knowledge of materials and processes
- Positively changes student perception of their own ability

### **Challenges of offering behind the scenes access**

- Moving away from a reactive system of engagement to a planned and sustainable programme
- Developing appropriate communication channels between universities and museums, including targeted advertising
- Encouraging compromise between curatorial, museum education and university staff
- Developing a programme that is both manageable by museum staff, and flexible enough to allow student input
- Increasing student engagement

### **Recommendations**

- Development of an organised access programme that can be planned into museum and university timetables.
- As part of this, the development of communication channels between museum and university staff, for both planning and feedback purposes.
- Review the advertising of student (or student-appropriate) resources, especially on museum websites, making better use of existing resources.
- Consider the presentation of online object databases, and alternative methods of object classification.

## Background

*'It is very typical of designers at all levels that they want to get to see what they cannot see to understand how something works and is constructed'.  
(Anonymous Design tutor)*

The initial planning stages of the Behind the Scenes project were informed by contact with several members of staff based in both the Learning & Interpretation Department of the V&A and the Faculty of Arts & Architecture at the University of Brighton. Preliminary research demonstrated that it is often a contentious subject, with tutors perhaps frustrated at a perceived lack of access, and curators both aware of their duty of care to the objects and their own busy schedules.

When the CETLD office at the V&A first opened, in 2006, we received a query from a tutor regarding behind the scenes access. The area that the tutor expressed interest in was

| *'Something like the storage buildings  
the repair workshop  
conservation dept  
wrapping up dept  
maintenance or records*

*anything which is out of the ordinary but related to the V&A... we are after a peep through a crack in the door or through a dusty window'  
(University of Brighton staff, personal correspondence, 2006).*

The CETLD team contacted colleagues in the Learning & Interpretation (L&I) Department, and were told that the museum was not able to offer any such tours at that time. L&I were keen for the development of a formal policy about offering access to students, because any such access is very resource heavy on the staff providing it. There was an L&I review of the talks and store visits offered by Museum staff scheduled for 2008, but due to staffing issues this has not yet taken place. There were also concerns expressed about the often undefined benefits of providing such access – *'often lecturers ask for this but their needs can be met quite well by using the permanent collections in the galleries'* (V&A staff, personal communication).

We subsequently realised that tutors and student groups were achieving this kind of access by liaising directly with curators. Some courses have long-standing arrangements with specific departments, while other trips are organised on a more ad-hoc basis. L&I are often unaware of these visits, despite them being one of the only museums in the country to have a dedicated HE officer post. The nature of behind the scenes access as it occurs at the moment is therefore usually ad hoc and fragmentary, often relying on personal contacts and individual timescales.

This is cause for concern for a number of reasons. L&I is concerned that these tours are formed without proper attention being paid to the educational

aims. Tutors are concerned to get access for something that they know, but cannot prove, is useful for their students. They are often insistent that *'most visits and most of the material presented [publicly in the museum] is not very satisfactory for HE students'* (University of Brighton staff, personal correspondence, 2006). In discussions regarding the use and application of collections, gaining access to those parts of collections that are not on display is raised again and again.

'Behind the scenes' access is a desire also clearly expressed in CETLD baseline research that was carried out in the autumn of 2006, but the form this access takes, and what it consists of and achieves, is not clearly defined within the research.

The aim of this project was to gather a body of evidence about what the Higher Education design community wants and needs from 'behind the scenes' access to the museum.

This project was designed to investigate the following areas of CETLD interest:

- Learning spaces: to better understand the museum as learning space, and investigate the idea of situated learning
- Practice-based learning: looking at fresh ideas to the idea of practice-based learning within the museum
- Student-centred approach: to engage with students in an investigation of their needs
- The use and application of collections: examining different possibilities of ways to use the collections for design students

It took three approaches in trying to understand the complex nature of the issues.

- 1) The first of these was to look at what the V&A specifically, and UK museums more generally, were currently offering students. This was designed to look at both the limitations that museums face in offering behind the scenes access, and the opportunities they can provide students with.
- 2) The second was to investigate these issues directly with tutors.
- 3) The third approach was to engage with students themselves.

This qualitative research took place in the context of a partnership with a member of the teaching staff from the University of Brighton, Cynthia Cousens (Senior Lecturer in Materials Practice). Cynthia helped with the recruitment of students for the behind the scenes tours, and also undertook some aspects of the research, as detailed in the Methodology section.

The main output of this project is this report, which examines the evidence, draws conclusions and makes recommendations of ways to move forward with some of the issues raised.

## Methodology

The baseline research that was carried out at the V&A in Autumn 2006 led directly to the development of two further projects by the V&A CETLD team (Fisher 2007). These were the 'Behind the Scenes' project and the CETLD Student Placement Programme. The two project managers, Beth Cook and Catherine Speight, developed a joint research strategy aimed at providing a framework to both projects that would strengthen each individual project (Cook and Speight 2008).

This research strategy was designed to use a version of grounded theory, whereby we gain *'an understanding about how persons or organizations or communities experience and respond to events that occur'* (Corbin and Holt 2004: 49). The concept of grounded theory was developed in the 1960s by Glaser & Strauss (1967), and is usually associated with qualitative research.

The key aspect of this research is that the theories generated are grounded in the data that is collected (Denscombe 2007: 287). Research usually takes the form of a number of rounds of data collection – analysis of the first round of data collection leads to initial concept identification. These concepts are then analysed and tested further with subsequent data collection. The data collection and analysis phases are alternated so that concepts can evolve and be refined. The constructivist viewpoint acknowledges that there are multiple ways of interpreting a specific set of data, and it is important to be aware of this aspect of the process of interpretation (Denscombe 2007: 287 & 300).

The joint research strategy was designed so that different research stages of the Behind the Scenes and the Student Placement projects alternated in order that results from each project could help the other. Unfortunately timetabling issues meant that this process was not as well integrated as the two project managers initially intended. Feedback was discussed informally among the project leaders as opposed to being disseminated in a completed manner.

Two stages of data collection for the Behind the Scenes project took place, finishing in May 2008 and December 2008. The start of this project was delayed due to staffing issues, and data collection has also been constrained by the difficulty of fitting in with university terms and timetables.

From the point of view of creating a truly grounded theory, therefore, this project would have benefited from further stages of data collection and analysis. The analysis has not yet reached the stage of saturation – *'the point in the research when no new concepts or further properties or dimensions of existing concepts emerge from data'* (Corbin and Holt 2004: 51). However, being aware of the methodology, and even just using the beginnings of the process helped to frame and guide the research in a productive manner and the collaboration proved useful to both projects.

This research also considered the idea of situated learning as developed by Lave & Wenger (Lave and Wenger 1991). This consists of two main principles:

- knowledge needs to be presented in an authentic context i.e. settings or applications that would normally involve that knowledge
- learning requires social interaction and collaboration (Lave and Wenger 1991)

The idea that learning as is normally occurs *'is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs...'* is particularly pertinent to the idea of learning within the museum. *'This contrasts with most classroom learning activities which involve knowledge which is abstract and out of context'* (Kearsley 1994-2009). One question that then arises is what knowledge a behind the scenes context encapsulates, and how learning about it helps Design students achieve their goals.

Lave & Wenger also created the term *'community of practice'* (Lave and Wenger 1998) as a means of exploring the notion of situated learning within a particular domain of social practice (Benzie, Mavers et al. 2005). The idea of a community of practice seeks to define how our interests, skills, and areas of knowledge bind us into communities. Lave & Wenger argue that people are generally involved in a number of different communities of practice, at different levels – this might be *'at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests'* (Smith 2003: 2). Initially within a community of practice, engagement and learning occurs at the periphery – with growing competence participants move nearer to the core or centre of the community - *'there is a concern with identity, with learning to speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense in the community... something more than simply "learning by doing"'* (Smith 2003: 4). A community of practice defines itself in 3 ways:

- What it is about
- How it functions
- What capability it has produced (Wenger 1998)

The idea is of great pertinence to students as they learn about their chosen subject, especially within the field of Design, where *'the employment of part-time practitioners to teach in creative subjects is seen as an important pedagogic strategy'* (Davies 2006). Davies also argues that students should seek to locate themselves within not just the community of practice of their chosen discipline, but also within the 'university life' community of practice. Members of a community of practice are brought together by *'what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities'* (Wenger 1998).

We would argue that museums have a greater role to play in both the creative industry and university communities, and part of this project was aimed at trying to understand how this could happen. Museums provide important opportunities for social engagement, a key part of learning within a community of practice, as well as for engagement with objects:

*'educational settings should aim at stimulating learning processes by providing learners with access to many different paths to knowledge. To consider themselves as 'centers [sic] of learning', museums and galleries*

should therefore provide more than displays on interesting themes; they should be able to connect these displays and themes to the life experiences of different groups of audiences' (Illeris 2006: 16-17).

## Methods

Stage	Method	Sample	Researcher
Museums Stage 1	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	6 museums, 13 participants	BC
	Website/telephone research	9 museums	CC
Museums Stage 2	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	6 museums	Cancelled
Tutors	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	6 participants	CC
Students Stage 1	1) Behind the scenes trip with personal meaning map exercise: <i>Fashion Department</i> 2) Group discussion. 3) Accompanied visit to temporary exhibition: <i>China Design Now</i>	11 participants <sup>1</sup>  11 participants 2 participants	BC
Students Stage 2	1) Behind the scenes trip with personal meaning map exercise: <i>Blythe House Theatre Stores</i> 2) Accompanied visit to temporary exhibition: <i>Magnificence of the Tsars</i> 3) Group discussion	12 participants <sup>2</sup>  3 participants  12 participants	BC

<sup>1</sup> Two groups of undergraduate students from the University of Brighton took part in the first stage of data collection, comprising a total of 11 students. This stage took place in April 2008. The first group were a Level 2, mixed subject group who were taking the elective module 'Breaking into the V&A' which was run by Rebecca Reynolds of the CETLD. The second group consisted of Level 1 and Level 3 Wood, Metal, Ceramic and Plastic (WMCP) volunteers, recruited by Cynthia Cousens.

<sup>2</sup> The second stage of student research took place in December 2008 and involved 12 students. The first group consisted of Level 1 and Level 3 Wood, Metal, Ceramic and Plastic (WMCP) volunteers, recruited by Cynthia Cousens. The second group consisted of Level 2, mixed subject students taking the creative writing elective module run by Rebecca Reynolds.



## Museum Research: Stage 1

Interviews of around 30 minutes each were carried out by Beth Cook. Participants included both curatorial and educational staff (please see Appendix 1 for the interview protocol). These interviews were aimed at investigating what a variety of museums currently offer in the way of a student service, with an emphasis on behind the scenes access. They also aimed to introduce the issue of what the purpose and value of such access is.

The museums were:

V&A, London  
Design Museum, London  
Brighton Museum, Brighton  
Geffrye Museum, London  
Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford  
Manchester Museum, Manchester

These museums were chosen to represent a variety of museum 'types', including national, university, and local museums, as well as covering different subjects.

In addition to this, Cynthia Cousens, Senior Lecturer in Materials Practice, conducted desk research into behind the scenes opportunities at the same museums. This consisted of both telephone and web-based research (please see Appendix 2 for the research questions). The aim of this section of the research was to obtain a tutor's view of the opportunities available for students on a visit to a museum that could then be contrasted with what staff at the museum consider they offer. This was not intended to 'catch anyone out', but to gain an understanding of the difficulties that both museum staff and tutors face, comparing what museums would like to provide against what they actually do.

Appendix 3 provides some further examples of behind the scenes opportunities from various museums.

## Museum Research: Stage 2 (incomplete)

It was intended to carry out a second phase of museum interviews with staff from some of the following museums:

British Museum, London  
Museum of English Rural Life, Reading  
MIMA, Middlesbrough  
Oriental Museum, Durham  
Sir John Soane's Museum, London  
Horniman Museum, London

This would have formed part of the alternating data collection/analysis stages contributing to a grounded theory, allowing the researchers to address issues

and concepts raised in the first stage of museum research. Unfortunately changes in the timetable for this project meant that there was not time to carry out this extra round of data collection.

### Tutor Research

Interviews of around 20 minutes each were carried out by Cynthia Cousens with 6 members of University of Brighton teaching staff (please see Appendix 4 for the interview protocol).

The subjects covered were:

- 3D Materials Practices
- 3D Design
- Interior Architecture
- Textiles with Business Studies – Knit and Print
- History of Design and Decorative Arts

These subjects were chosen to represent a wide range of design disciplines taught at the University of Brighton, including both practice- and theory-based subjects.

We interviewed tutors because they often recommend museums or exhibitions to students, and may organise trips to them. It is also mainly through tutors that students seem to gain behind the scenes access. This section of the research was therefore designed to address questions of existing access to 'behind the scenes', and how tutors believe such access benefits their students.

### Student Research

This stage of the research worked with a total of 23 student volunteers on organised day trips (14 Wood, Metal, Ceramic & Plastic (WMCP) students and 9 extension studies students)

The data collection took three main forms:

- 1) Personal meaning mapping exercise related to behind the scenes trip
- 2) Group Discussion
- 3) Accompanied visit to an exhibition

The first of these was a Personal Meaning Mapping exercise. The trigger material was simply the phrase 'behind the scenes'. The aim was to try and understand what students understood by this phrase, and if or how they relate this kind of access to their work and their learning within the museum. The first stage was carried out before the behind the scenes visit, and the second stage after this, but before any other activity.

## Personal Meaning Mapping

Personal Meaning Mapping was developed by Falk and Dierking as a result of their belief that *'a major impediment to the successful understanding of the role that museums play in facilitating public learning is the paucity of valid and reliable instruments specifically suited to the unique contextual realities of free-choice learning'* (Adams, Falk et al. 2003: 18).

Personal meaning mapping is designed *'to measure how a specified learning experience uniquely affects each individual's understanding or meaning-making process'* (Adams, Falk et al. 2003: 22). It focuses on the degree of change in understanding, rather than specific details of what has been learnt. It was designed specifically for use in settings such as art and natural history museums or science centres (Caban, Scott et al. 2002).

The process involves asking participants to respond to a trigger word or phrase by writing down on a blank piece of paper whatever comes to mind related to the trigger (See Appendix 5 for example of a blank personal meaning map and some of the student's completed ones). This can be drawn or written, it can be fact, opinion, ideas, individual words, phrases or thoughts. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer.

Often this is followed by a period when the data collector talks to the participant about what they have written and asks them to expand on their answers. Due to the nature and timetable of the Behind the Scenes research, this stage was not included in the research.

Participants then undergo an experience – visiting an exhibition, for example, or taking a behind the scenes tour. After this experience, they are asked to revisit their original personal meaning map and, using a different colour pen, consider if there is anything they would like to add or change, based on their experience. This is followed by another interview – in the Behind the Scenes research this took the form of a group discussion.

It is based on a relativist-constructivist view of learning – that prior knowledge + new experience = learning (Moussouri 2007).

Analysis of the personal meaning maps has a number of potential stages – the whole process is designed to be flexible to the needs of individual research projects. First is the identification of clusters or patterns in the responses (Adams, Falk et al. 2003: 24).

Cont...

Next the data is examined for four key areas:

- Extension of one's knowledge and feelings (increased vocabulary)
- Breadth of understanding (concepts)
- Depth of understanding
- Mastery: the overall quality of one's understanding (Moussouri 2007).

In the first round of data collection, the second data collection activity was a group discussion that took place after the morning tour. This was guided by some fixed questions, but was flexible to also allow for the discussion to go in unanticipated directions, depending on the students' responses (please see Appendix 6 for the group discussion protocol).

The inclusion of a visit to a temporary exhibition was designed to give the students the chance to visit the museum as they more usually would. The baseline research revealed that it is often temporary exhibitions that are the trigger for a student visit, and the main purpose. At first I considered this mainly as an incentive for students to take part in the research. However, during the first stage of data collection I realised it could play a much more important function, allowing students the opportunity to reflect on the different kinds of experiences and compare the benefits/drawbacks. Therefore, in the second round of data collection I scheduled the group discussion for the end of the day, once the students had been both behind the scenes and to the temporary exhibition.

The data collection method took the form of accompanied visits to the exhibition. During this visit, the majority of students were left to experience it on their own, but two accompanied visits were facilitated (this was limited by staff availability - only the Research Fellow and Project Support Officer were available to take part in this stage of the research). In the first visit two students were accompanied, and in the second stage three students took part, as two of them went round the exhibition in a pair.

When planning the research I debated the different merits of participant observation and accompanied visits for this part of the data collection. Participant observation would consist of observing the students in the exhibition, but not interacting with them at all. In accompanied visits, individual students (or pairs of students) were accompanied around the exhibition, and asked to talk about their visit as they experienced it. Their experiences were observed and the different factors that appeared to influence their visits were noted. The observers also prompt the respondents for further information or clarification of comments or behaviour in order to help identify the meaning for the student or tutor. The researcher in this situation needs to be aware of the possibility of their presence influencing the responses from the participants, but nonetheless I decided to use the more active accompanied visits format because it had proved very informative in previous projects (Cook 2006).

## **Timetable**

The project was proposed, and funding granted, in May 2007. However, due to staffing issues the project did not begin until November 2007. This was related to the length of time it took to recruit a Project Support Officer to replace the project leader. The project was originally due to be completed in July 2008 but extension funding was granted in May 2008 and permission granted for the project to be extended to June 2009.

### Project Staffing:

The project was led by CETLD Research Fellow, Beth Cook. In addition, Cynthia Cousens (Senior Lecturer, Materials Practice) from the University of Brighton worked closely on the project.

Important contributions were also made by Tanya Gomez and Sharla Mann from the University of Brighton, Holly Burrows from the CETLD, and Susan North and Jane Pritchard from the V&A.

## **Background Research**

This review began in November 2007 with the aim of investigating what relevant work had already been done on or around this subject. This section reports on some of the findings from this research. Appendix 7 also reports on other relevant projects the CETLD team have come across over the last couple of years but which have not directly impacted on this project.

Museum education provision is currently largely focused on school education. This is demonstrated in the literature and in practice. *'In general, museum offerings fall into the following categories: teacher and school services, adult education, and family and youth programmes'* (Stone 2001: 57). HE students often fall under adult provision. However, the needs of a student working on a specific project and with specific learning objectives may be very different to the needs of other adults who visit the museum.

Curators are often more than willing to provide access to their collections, particularly to tutors/practitioners they know and respect, but are constrained by time, schedules, and the nature of stores, and are unwilling to be further constrained by the concerns of education departments. However, the ad hoc nature of this access, and the lack of clear guidelines surrounding it, mean that the current system is very unfair to a large number of students who are unable to access a service that a few students, through their tutors, can.

The desire for 'behind the scenes' access is often revealed during museum based projects. One Continuing Professional Development evaluation at the V&A, for example, revealed that:

*'both [participants] reported having problems convincing some of their students of the value of visiting places like the V&A and the barriers associated with them... The V&A may want to develop student-orientated*

*events where they would be invited 'behind the scenes'... this may contribute to combating some of the personal, social and psychological barriers of participation' (Moussouri 2005: 33).*

This chimes very closely with much CETLD research, both evidenced (Fisher 2007) and anecdotal. Museums can have a very important role to play in the education of creative practitioners, but it is not always easy to get that message across to students. Hein (1998) reported that many visitors (especially those involved in creative practice), when recounting their own history with museums, report a moment of epiphany within a museum experience (Haanstra 2003: 33).

One such example is the designer Ossie Clark. The quote below reveals points of view which are often found among students today:

*'(Bernard Neville) I would take them to the V&A and ask Madeleine Ginsburg to get out all the old Schiaparelli toiles to examine the cut. They said they didn't want to look at "old-fashioned things"... For Ossie, however, this revelation of the past was completely inspiring... "The mini-skirt which Mary Quant claimed to have invented – what about Egypt? What about the 1920s showgirl dancers?"' (Watt 2005: 37-38).*

Equally, the milliner Stephen Jones who co-curated a 2009 V&A exhibition *Hats: An Anthology by Stephen Jones* is quoted as saying he was encouraged as a student to visit the V&A but that *'It was more than the actual objects, it was the whole world of museums. We rarely, if ever, drew the costumes; we were encouraged to focus on items as diverse as porcelain and glass...'* (Heal 2009: 30-32).

Another CETLD funded project, 'Exploring Teaching and Learning Through Practice' was undertaken by Alma Boyes, Cynthia Cousens, and Helen Stuart. This examined the importance of handling sessions as part of practice based learning, *'where the materiality and objectiveness of an artefact is explored by touch and other senses rather than virtually or visually only'* (Cousens 2008). Although the Behind the Scenes project did not directly address the issue of handling sessions, the initial idea was influenced by a handling session within the V&A organised as part of the Exploring Teaching and Learning Through Practice project in June 2007. This access appeared to be very beneficial for the students:

*'dramatically and directly affecting their work: for example, one student wrote her undergraduate thesis on handling sessions, and two developed tactile-based research themes for their graduation studio work. The session was cited by the students and noted by the external examiner as an example of good teaching practice' (Cousens 2008)*

Other tutors the CETLD has had contact with have expressed similar views about the importance of students engaging with issues relevant to their studies in situations outside of university:

*'It is very important for students to start to engage with 'real' situations and issues and to have access to spaces and expertise about those spaces'* (UoB staff, personal correspondence, 2007).

Two important reports were published in 2008 that address the issue of access to collections. First is *Collections for People* (Keene 2008) and second is *Discovering physical objects: Meeting researchers' needs* (RIN 2008).

Keene's report was based on a study looking at how museums' stored collections are currently used, and how they could be used more effectively. It acknowledged the range of provision available *'from open stores to individual appointments for researchers'* but concluded that *'Users, especially the interested public, too seldom experience access to the 2900 million items in the collections of English and Welsh museums as a public right and a valid service in which museum should excel'* (Keene 2008: 7). Reasons given for this are familiar – problems of access to objects, often stored off site; limited staff; unsuitable space; and limited resources (Keene 2008: 29). This report made recommendations for practical measures that museums can consider to improve access, including the following:

- Users want museums to publish what is in their collections, preferably online, at least in collection description level.
  - Museums... should provide examples to give people ideas on how they could be used.
- (Keene 2008: 9)

The second report was produced by the Research Information Network. *Discovering physical objects: Meeting researchers' needs* (RIN 2008) looked at researchers in four subjects (archaeology, art history, earth sciences and social and economic history), at the importance of objects and collections to their research, and at how museums are supporting this need (RIN 2008: 5). The report emphasises the importance of *'seeing and handling the objects themselves, rather than relying on a description or a digital image'* (RIN 2008: 13). This research emphasised the importance of handling the object in order to feel things like its weight and how it fits in the hand (RIN 2008). Handling an object also gives the opportunity to look at and see details only visible from, for example, an upside down perspective. The role of curatorial staff, literature about the objects, and online catalogues in providing a complete picture was also emphasised, as was the importance of personal contacts within institutions (RIN 2008). The report makes a number of recommendations, including the following: *'2. Getting catalogue records online quickly... 3. Clear and open policies on access... 6. Engaging with researchers'* (RIN 2008: 45-47). These findings support CETLD findings from the baseline research programme and subsequent research.

## Results

### Museum Interviews

#### Definition of 'behind the scenes access'

The first question all participants were asked was 'What does the phrase 'behind the scenes access' mean to you?' There was an acknowledgement that interest in behind the scenes is universal. There was often an initial response that it is '*what it says on the tin*' (Educator) and there was an obvious divide between the two kinds of staff. Curators tended to give very practical answers, often focused on the actual spaces involved, while education staff often focused more on the experience –

*'Stores, exhibition preparatory areas, offices for staff... conservation, technical services'* (Curator).

*'access to parts of the collection that are not on display... Access to how they are stored... There is also interest in rooms'* (Curator).

*'stuff you wouldn't normally see... it would have to be pre-booked, and would need specific objectives that were planned'* (Museum Educator).

*'to get closer to the objects and to parts of the museum that you don't usually see. But it is also more than that – about intellectual access, getting to the nub of what the museum or object is about'* (Museum Educator).

However, a number of respondents, such as the educator quoted immediately above, had a more nuanced idea about this. There was an understanding that it includes access to both objects (including the ways they are catalogued and stored) and to staff, processes, and ideas. Issues such as funding and collecting policy were mentioned. The idea that interpretation is key to a successful behind the scenes experience was mentioned by two respondents (both educators) and that, very importantly, there needs to be a clear purpose and plan in order for a behind the scenes experience to be valuable.

#### HE students visiting the museum

The majority of respondents had no special remit for working with HE students although they were positive about student groups being brought to the museum. Seven respondents spoke exclusively about HE access in response to the questions, while the others also mentioned the kind of access that other visitors, such as school groups or the interested visitor, can get.

Examples of behind the scenes or alternative access that students have achieved include the following:

- Students looking at bird skins at Manchester Museum.



- Architecture talks with objects in the V&A Prints and Drawing study room.
- The Design Museum jointly runs an MA in Curating Contemporary Design which offers students a great deal of privileged access.
- The Booth Museum (Brighton Museums) offers a lending service to some students.

One respondent stated that *'there is not blanket answer, though. It depends on the time involved'* (Curator). There was a clear feeling that the majority of behind the scenes opportunities are reactive to requests from students or, more frequently, tutors rather than an active priority of museum staff, who have a number of other priorities. The Design Museum was the only museum to have a regular programme providing behind the scenes access, and this was only for students on their MA course – approximately 20 students per year.

Booking was considered vital for all privileged access, in terms of both organising an appropriate experience (gaining access to the right objects) and from the point of view of staff time. Numbers of students that an individual museum would be able to accommodate varied considerably, from 1 or 2 people in some store rooms up to around 20, depending on the space available.

All six museums allowed some photography and some drawing, though restrictions often applied (i.e. on materials for drawing, or on flash photography). There was largely a positive response to this question, with a number of respondents more positive about drawing than photography:

*'It is better to draw because you actually have to look at the object: sometimes people come in, take a few photographs, and go, and I always feel disappointed, like they have missed out'* (Curator).

#### Offering behind the scenes access

Despite the examples given of different kinds of access granted to students, and the general feeling that student groups are an important and valid audience, there was no consensus between respondents as to whether museums should offer behind the scenes access.

The interviews indicate that there are two problematic areas related to this question. The first area is one of practicality. A lack of suitable space to facilitate student groups was mentioned in 8 of 13 interviews. Although there is often a space for school groups in the museum, demand for this space is high and student groups were not a priority. A lack of staff time also came up in 6 of the interviews – 3 respondents stated explicitly that this was a limiting factor in what they could offer, and 3 others spoke of specific projects that they had worked on with school or student groups that, while interesting and enjoyable, had been very time consuming. A tension was also revealed between education and curatorial departments – 3 respondents mentioned the greater access that curators often have to the stores and other behind the

scenes areas, which means that educators are constrained in what they can offer independently. This point was made very succinctly by one respondent:

*'Curators have power over educators: educators need curators to work with them in order to do their jobs. Curators don't need educators in order to do their jobs'* (Museum Educator).

Also included in considerations of practicality was the issue of object safety, and arguments relating to a museum's duty of care to its collections. Concern for objects was mentioned in 7 of the 13 interviews.

The second area of concern appears to be one of uncertainty as to what, exactly, is gained by a behind the scenes visit.

*'if you are talking to people doing a job, you gain something, but I am not sure that just being able to look at more objects – what else does that gain?'* (Museum Educator)

*'Yes, I think it is interesting and useful for students to see the mechanisms of the museum. But I think a lot of front-of-house stuff isn't used as efficiently as it could be.'* (Museum Educator)

*'If you are just talking about looking at stores, from the point of view that students think it is 'fascinating to see', then no. I am not sure this is very useful. What would be more useful is better access to the things we already do'* (Curator).

*'The nicest things are out on display – why look at the things that are not as nice?'* (Museum Educator)

This issue is a key one, and relates to the development of communication channels between museum and university staff<sup>3</sup>. One curator mentioned a generic email address that student enquiries come through. Others said most enquiries originate with tutors – backing up the idea that personal contacts are key when arranging access, and emphasising the informal nature of much of this communication.

Other respondents had strong views on positive aspects, although this ranged from an unspecific sense of 'added value' to a more specific understanding of the importance of object handling – analysis of the benefits was not, in most cases, deeply considered:

*'the purpose would be almost debunking the perceptions of what museums do... to make it valuable and worthwhile I think that behind the scenes access needs to have a purpose – a clear, explicit purpose'* (Museum Educator)

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<sup>3</sup> For example, aesthetic issues of 'niceness' are not always a key consideration of Design students.

*'I do get a sense that it is very valuable. They really enjoy getting behind the scenes – actually, I think as much as the information they get from me'* (Curator).

*'The key part of my job is facilitating research visits, providing access to objects'* (Curator)

*'handling objects – there is nothing to compare to that – the feel of objects, and the weight of them'* (Curator)

When discussing what they did offer, it was clear that there is a great deal more on offer than many visitors are aware of. With regard to the Prints and Drawings room at the V&A, for example, one curator commented *'People don't think they can just walk in'*, although the nature of this access is advertised in museum literature and on the website. There was a feeling of frustration that visitors sometimes assume things aren't available, without actually trying to gain access.

A number of other responses indicated that although privileged access is available in theory, it is not advertised as being so, in order to keep numbers down:

*'We do as much as we can, and I'm not aware of any complaints. But we don't advertise, which helps to keep demand down'* (Curator).

This can be counter productive, and there is a fine line between protecting the service that a museum can comfortably provide, and appearing unavailable.

*'I would be happy to meet groups, but no tutors have asked to be welcomed'* (Museum Educator).

The interviews demonstrated that museum staff are often aware of the appeal of behind the scenes access, but are also very aware of the constraints they face in offering such access. Three of the six museums involved have recently opened new spaces – the Sackler Centre for Arts Education at the V&A, the Resource Centre at Manchester Museum, and an extension at the Pitt Rivers Museum which includes a large research room and a secure object storage area. It was not within the scope of this research to investigate, but it would be interesting to know how these have affected student visitor statistics and experiences.

### **Phone/internet research (conducted by Cynthia Cousens)**

This research looked into information on HE access to museums on websites from the point of view of a tutor interested in bringing student groups to the museum, potentially with a behind the scenes trip in mind. Some of the information researched relates to HE provision generally, but still provides a valuable insight into the experience of tutors who try to engage with museums.

Nine sites were researched, including national museums, local museums and those attached to a HE institution. These included all those where staff were interviewed, plus the British Museum, the Museum of English Rural Life, and the Middlesborough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA).

Four of the nine museums offered no provision for HE students on the website with only schools or adult education categorised. The Manchester Museum, despite being attached to a university, had no visible provision aimed at HE. The Pitt Rivers, attached to Oxford University flagged up research visits. The British Museum, V&A, and Museum of Rural Life both had sections for HE students. Museum of Rural Life had a dedicated undergraduate education officer and linked with modules taught as part of the Reading University courses.

The Design Museum was the only museum that appeared to offer a developed programme for HE/FE students, called Design Factory. They stated that the programme “collaborates with HE design courses to nurture new talent and showcase up and coming student designers” and “it is our aim that tutors will build Design Factory into their core curriculum, fostering life-long sustainable links and relationships between the Design Museum, Universities and the design communities of the future.”

Programmes were developed in collaboration with tutors from HE institutions, for example Central St Martins, and involved design projects stemming from exhibition visits, which could be incorporated into curriculum. These were multidisciplinary, spanning Fashion/ Textiles, Product Design, Graphic Design/ Illustration and Architecture. Other activities aimed at students were special late open nights for students, and design competitions. The website contained the project briefs and well illustrated examples of students at various stages of working through the brief in the museum. There was also a range of downloadable information and support and access to databases. The programme as a whole was specifically targeted at students and appeared to be very appropriate.

MIMA, Middlesborough Institute of Modern Art, a smaller museum, also had a developed HE programme researched more fully by phone. It was more informal than the Design Museum but was also collaborative with local Universities and colleges. The programme was flexible and could be developed through discussion with the education staff to suit requirements. It could include tours of conservation, handling objects from the collections, tours and talks and other forms of input by curators. There was also a flexible educational space which could be used for workshops studio space, seminars etc which was regularly used by students. The programme could be specifically tailored for HE students needs.

The V&A had a clear guide for both students and lecturers to help navigate through museum resources and education programmes for the public but seemed to offer little in the way of specific provision (although it did offer free entry to pre-booked organised visits to exhibitions).

Schools provision existed at all museums sometimes with very developed programmes and facilities especially training sessions and panels for teachers to develop their visits. Pitt Rivers had an online resource for teachers and pupils called Artefact, which was creatively and visually presented containing examples of artists sketchbooks etc. The Museum of English Rural Life had an easy to access informative online object database. The Design Museum's schools programme included lectures by designers on their work, design process, and career paths.

The programme of adult education at the British Museum included handling sessions and meet the curators.

Generally photography permission was listed but policy on drawing was only mentioned on the V&A site.

Most had clear maps and directions to the museum and information on public transport and parking if available. Most of the websites were easy to access and information found under visiting or education/learning. From a research point of view, most websites took under 10 minutes to find and download the relevant information. The Pitt Rivers took 10-20 mins (there were some problems with viewing the galleries and due to the amount of relevant information on Artefact); while 20-30 minutes were spent on the Design Museum (amount of relevant detailed information such as design briefs etc) V&A, (accessing different areas of the website without links was difficult) and The British Museum (finding information) websites. The websites of the major museums were generally more complex to access.

## **Comparison**

These two areas of research form an interesting comparison. The V&A staff, for example, expressed opinions that there was a lot of material and opportunities available for students, but that they don't seem to know about them, or try to find out about them. Along with staff from other museums, this was a source of frustration. However, the tutor research of the V&A website revealed that this information was not easily accessible. It is not just the case that they should spend more time looking – no internet user will spend more than 20-30 minutes looking for hard to find information that may not even exist. Museums need to consider how they advertise the services that they want students to make use of.

Four of the nine museums offered no specific provision for HE students on the website. This contrasts with a positive response from all participants when asked about student groups coming to the museum. The real issue seems to be one of priorities – student groups should come to museums, but they are a relatively small group and therefore often lose out in the allocation of resources.

The issue of considering ways of communication is critical here. The emphasis on providing a service, but not advertising it, is troubling. In one sense it is understandable – there is a great interest in such services, and in

resource-restricted situations decisions need to be made about where the greatest gain can be achieved. However, it does seem a little disingenuous to consider that a service is offered when very few people have the opportunity to access it. The importance of personal contacts is clear, but also creates a situation where some students have privileged access over others.

### **Tutor Research, conducted by Cynthia Cousens**

6 members of the academic staff teaching on undergraduate design courses at the University of Brighton were interviewed in Spring-Autumn 2008. The interviews were structured, with the same questions being asked to each tutor, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

#### Arranging visits to museums

5 out of 6 Tutors had had experience of arranging visits to museums; for some museums visits were a regular feature of their teaching. Although two tutors cited that they had not done so recently because of the limitations of available staff time, timetable restrictions and cost of travel for students. Some encouraged students to arrange or to go on collective visits without the tutor and all suggested students should visit museums individually and independently. One tutor thought this was the most appropriate route as it could be more specialised to their work and needs.

#### The museums visited

A wide range of types of museums were visited; varying from national, British Museum and the Horniman; to local museums such as the Booth Museum and Charleston Farmhouse. Some held very specialist collections: such as the Museum of Surgeons and the Newhaven Fort Museum and others more general collections: for example, The National Gallery. Some of the museums held specific design collections, such as The Design Museum and the Fashion and Textile Museum and others were not primarily design related such as Portsmouth Dock Yards, and National Science Museum. The most popular were the V&A, which all tutors cited as visiting, followed by Sir John Soane's Museum, and The Brighton Museums.

#### Reasons for visiting

One reason given for taking students to museums was for the observation and experience, including handling, of actual artefacts. This was aimed primarily at gathering material knowledge and understanding, for example on: scale, materials, processes and construction methods. Tutors were also interested in students recording information, including by drawing, and the loan of artefacts for off-site work. Visits to specific curated exhibitions, where exemplars were selected and given context, were also cited for engaging students in historical and contextual debate. There was an interest in museology more generally, including display, archives, and historical context. It was felt that the visits broaden students' general vision in art and design culture, deepened existing knowledge and led to discovery of new knowledge which was often gained through a serendipitous process. That surprise and self-discovery, led to ownership of knowledge and the development of the student as an independent researcher. The museum environment supported

teaching in practical ways: containing the students within the site enabling tutors to keep in touch easily with students; iGuides and trails providing structured paths and background information; giving a behavioural framework for study; and engendering respect and authority in the selection of exemplary artefacts.

#### Behind the scenes visits

4 out of 6 staff had arranged behind the scenes visits to museums, including 2 to the V&A, and one had arranged a trip in a gallery context. They defined behind the scenes as meaning anything not generally open to the public. This included a very wide range of activity: seeing, studying or handling the artefacts out of display, in another context; visiting the stores to see storage and wrapping processes; conservation; access to archives: acquisition information and drawings; understanding of cataloguing and key search words for finding artefacts; interchange with curators (cited by all tutors) for their personal knowledge of the artefact and how to handle it, enthusiasm and its historical context and in the development of exhibitions and even the philosophy behind public programming.

#### Experience of organising behind the scenes visits

Tutors had had mixed success in planning and executing behind the scenes visits. Some had very positive experiences, others flagging difficulties of there being no formal system in place through which to arrange the visits, restrictions to do with health and safety, lack of negotiation to reach a compromised visit. There was also recognition of the limitations of behind the scenes visits, the fragility and value of the artefacts and available time of the curators. Several had had more success with local museums, where a relationship had often built up with the museum over time.

#### Provision for behind the scenes visits

5 out of 6 tutors considered a book-able, educational space as being important to support teaching during the behind the scenes visit, which could be used for a variety of purposes: including introducing a project, holding a review, discussion, inviting a lecturer, as well as for quiet study and recording of artefacts. Practical considerations requested for the room included chairs, data projector and ventilation and other items such as magnifying glasses and folding chairs to support observation and recording of the artefacts were also valued. There was a request for provision of information: for example that which could be accessed before the visit on the collections, or items to be viewed; or simply exhibition publicity produced by the museums; or i-Guides or trails around the collections and galleries.

#### Benefits of behind the scenes visits

The tutors perceived value in behind the scenes visits in contributing to the development of concepts and visual ideas in the student work; in gaining knowledge, especially tacit knowledge of materials and process used in the making of objects; and in engaging in historical and contextual debate stemming from the artefacts. In addition, handling of the artefact away from the formal display served to place it within the students' own context and

contribute to a deeper learning. Study of exemplary pieces and their manufacture also positively changed student perception of their own ability.

Behind the scenes access was considered by all the tutors to be beneficial to the students as part of their design learning process. They perceived that not only there were specific and differing needs and interests for students from the different areas of design but also within that it could be very individual for students. It was important that the experience was connected to their learning. Broadly speaking, they felt that the visits contributed to the students' development of concepts, material understanding and knowledge of making skills, and understanding of the context around objects, as well as giving insight into curation and museology as career paths. The specific experience of handling an artefact, in comparison to seeing a 2D printed image or viewing the artefact in the displays gave rich tacit understanding. The change in the artefacts physical context when experienced out of display also opened up fresh contexts and made immediate connection with the students own work. It was also seen to make a more efficient and effective use of tutors' time on a museum visit. All the tutors felt it was a valuable additional form of access alongside other forms of visits to museums.

### **Student Research**



Museums should be a vital resource for students. In 2007-08 18% of UK-origin visitors (and 11% of all visitors) to the V&A were students (V&A 2008) – a significant proportion of the audience.



They should provide opportunities for both inspiration and solid referencing. Often they do – ‘we went one afternoon a week to the Museum, and made careful copies of fashion illustrations.... Then he showed us what inspired them, so we looked at Chinese pottery and Japanese wrapping paper’ (Watt, 2003; 38) – but equally often it seems that there is a communication disjuncture between students and museums.

This stage of the research, for example, experienced unanticipated problems in recruiting enough students to take part. Recruiting students to take part in our research has been one of the areas where we have often struggled in the CETLD, but for three reasons I thought that this research would not struggle with such issues:

- a) The amount of interest in behind the scenes access that our other research identified.
- b) The presence of a tutor in the project, providing the project with a familiar, academic, and enthusiastic presence.
- c) The negation of some of the reasons most frequently cited for why students don’t visit museums – including practical concerns of distance and cost; fear of navigation problems; and a lack of knowledge about what the museum contains and how it is organised.

However, we still had trouble recruiting enough students to take part. Both the project leaders and Cynthia Cousens have reflected on the reasons for this. Firstly is the fact that participation was voluntary and not tied into a course or any graded work. Another part of the problem is that Wood, Metal, Ceramics and Plastics students often did not consider that the Fashion or the Theatre collections were ‘*relevant*’ to their studies. This was more of an issue for Level 1 students than higher level students, one of whom commented ‘*they should be interested in everything, not just metal, everything can be inspiring*’. Some students were concerned about the amount of work they had to undertake, and how taking a full day to visit the museum would impact upon this. Many students failed to understand that this was essentially a ‘one off’ opportunity. In the case of the first trip, although 8 students signed up to attend, 3 dropped out either the night before or morning of the trip.

It is hard to convince both university and museum staff of the benefit of providing such access, which often takes a great deal of time to organise, when the target audience for the access does not, despite words to the contrary, actually appear enthused by it.

However, this research eventually worked with a total of 23 enthusiastic and engaged students, and gathered a great deal of useful information. This will be analysed through the different methods used.

### Personal Meaning Maps (PMMs)

Initial analysis of the personal meaning maps was based around looking for recurring themes, concepts or ideas.

These included:

Pre (number of occurrences)

- Backdoors/restricted/security (16)
- Employees (behind the scenes) (13)
- Secrets/hidden objects (10)
- PR/adverts/exhibition planning (7)
- Rare/precious items (7)
- Curiosity/privilege/feelings (6)
- Interaction/handling (6)

Post (number of occurrences)

- Storage/boxes/archives (14)
- Employees (12)
- Secrets/hidden/covered (10)
- Restoration/preservation/conservation (10)
- Excitement/feelings (10)
- History (6)

The pre-visit PMMs frequently used words such as *'dark'*, *'dusty'*, *'secrets'* and revealed a feeling of curiosity about both the spaces and the objects in them. There was also a great deal of interest in the kind of people who worked behind the scenes – cleaners, curators, artists in residence, electricians, education staff and label writers were all mentioned, for example. There was interest therefore in both the objects that are stored behind the scenes, and the work that goes on (both around the objects and stores, and around other work of the museum too). There was a great deal of focus on the expected *'experience'* of the visit.

The post-visit alterations to the maps revealed a number of areas where the visit had altered the students' opinions. One who had said *'dusty'*, for example, appended that comment with the words *'not with textiles – scrupulous'*.

There were other occasions where opinions had been reinforced. Security was a major theme of the pre-visit PMMs, and the data suggests that the visit largely reinforced these ideas. One student from the Blythe House visit who had originally marked *'security men'* added *'x 2'* after the visit, and commented on the pass that they had been given.

It is interesting that, despite all the talk about the importance of seeing and touching the objects, there was quite an even split between comments about the objects, and about other subjects such as storage. One new theme that emerged strongly after the visit was around the way that objects were stored. Both pre- and post-visit data mentioned *'boxes'*, *'drawers'* and *'cupboards'*, but comments after the visit included :

*'Thousands of boxes that all look similar in appearance – yet all contain very unusual treasures – exciting surprises'*

*'Like a secret garden'*

*'Lots of things covered over, peeking out – tantalising'*

There were a number of other quotes such as *'expensive boxes'* and *'lots of boxes'*, demonstrating the level of student interest in some of the potentially mundane aspects of the behind the scenes tours.

These next two quotes from post-visit PMMs provide an interesting contrast in responses. You sense with the first student a sense of disappointment at not being able to touch the items, but pleasure at not being kept away by a glass cabinet. The second student seems more overwhelmed by the experience.

*'Didn't handle – understandable with textiles, but good to get close'*

*'Feel very lucky, was scared to even breathe on the pieces'*

There were a few grumbles about not seeing what they wanted (one student appended the original *'puppets'* with *'none'*) but generally comments were excited. The data reveals a sense of appreciation for the experience, even when there are areas where individual students did not achieve individual goals.

*'Very surreal seeing artefacts/garments with no display banners, changes their contexts, they do not seem as special'*

This quote is a very interesting response. The idea that the objects that are on public display in the museum have been chosen from the stores, researched, and written about seems to give them an extra level of meaning and authority for this student, over those objects that have been left in the stores, not chosen for display. More PMMs indicate that contact with the curators was a valuable part of the experience that added to the perceived value of the experience. The original PMMs revealed interest in the range of staff who work behind the scenes. There were a number of new comments about the conservation work that goes on in a museum and the post-visit PMMs show an extension of appreciation for the role that they did have the most contact with:

*'curators knowledge and excitement'*

*'[curator] really informative and charismatic'*

One area that the data did not really address was the explicit idea of the value of a visit. There was some discussion of this. *'Historical talks'*, for example, was appended with:

*'objects important to visualise historical construction methods'*  
and

*'importance of preserving history and what objects such as the garments explain about the past'.*

However, there was not an overriding sense in the data of a greatly increased depth of understanding about what such a visit could specifically achieve for the participants in their role as Design students.

### Reflections on Behind the Scenes Tours

These trips provided the students with contact with the curators, something that both tutors and students have identified previously as being of interest to them. The curators explained in each case a bit about the work that they do, and also about how people do gain access to the collections.

In the Fashion stores the students were shown a number of objects, including some that are often on display such as Margaret Layton's jacket from the British Galleries, as well as others which are not on display. Although the students were not allowed to touch, they were able to get very close to the objects.

The students during this part of the trip appeared interested but not particularly enthralled. The accompanying staff members were the only people who asked questions of the curator.

One object in particular did grab the attention of the students. This object was a whalebone collar. This relatively plain item – dull in colour, its purpose not immediately recognisable, was the first item that provoked student questions. (as previously mentioned, the issue of 'niceness' is often not a key concern of Design students). The curator explained that recently the fashion department have begun to use x-rays to see what is inside some of the clothes. The fact that the collar was made of materials including paper, bone, and cotton wool seemed to resonate more with the students than some of the other, fabric based objects. This observation backs up their own pre-visit concerns regarding what kinds of things were 'relevant' to them as students of wood, metal, ceramics and plastic – and not fabric.

The students were also very interested in the buildings we passed by in the back of house area, and in the general experience of being behind the scenes. At the end of this first visit my question to myself was therefore what they had gained from the visit that was specific to their experience as Design students, as opposed to any interested person visiting behind the scenes.

The second group of students who visited the Theatre Collections at Blythe House were more vocal than the first group with their questions. The group, again formed of mainly Level 1 students, included a couple more mature students, and it was these students who asked the most questions. The Theatre collections objects that the students saw consisted of a greater range of types of object, including costumes, posters, 3d programmes and examples of set design models. The students were again interested in the stores

themselves as well as the objects – one took a series of pictures of shelves filled with crumpled cardboard boxes.

### Accompanied Visit to Exhibition

Two students were accompanied around the China Design Now exhibition, and three around the Magnificence of the Tsars exhibition. Although this is a relatively small sample, some of their comments and behaviours reveal interesting aspects to the ways that the different experiences were viewed by the students.

One student who was accompanied around China Design Now stated that she liked it more than she thought she would – she spoke about the differences between ‘design’ (that she thought the exhibition would be about) and ‘craft’ (which she associated herself much more strongly with) – Designers *‘don’t necessarily have to make what they design’*.

This student commented that she found the morning’s visit *‘difficult’*, in contrast with one she had attended to the Jewellery department the previous year, which she characterised as *‘completely different’*. In this visit the students had been allowed to handle the objects, which had been the main purpose of the visit. This access had been negotiated between the tutor and the curator, and the students had researched the items they would be seeing before their visit. This unusual level of access was partly possible because the Jewellery gallery was at that time closed for redevelopment. In the visit to the Fashion department, the student felt that the amount of objects they had seen had been limited, and that they could have been explained more. The visit behind the scenes of the Fashion Department was perhaps more formal than this student’s previous experience, and less focused on individual object study but on the more general work of the department.

However, more direct comparisons between the experience of being behind the scenes and the experience of being in the temporary exhibition revealed a more positive perspective. The second student on an accompanied visit stated that:

*‘Behind the scenes... was more of an engaging experience and there was a flow between seeing and learning. Here I feel more of a disconnection in my experience as I have to stop and read about an object before I see it’*

The above quote is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly there is the *‘flow between seeing and learning’* – this identified connection is of great importance in both Design and museum pedagogy. The sense of sight is the predominant sense employed when visiting a museum normally – when looking at the objects and reading the labels, for example. The other senses are important in learning as well, both in Design and in other subjects, but it is interesting that the student identified this as the predominant experience that had led to learning in the morning’s session.

Second is the way that the student considered that reading about the object created a *'disconnection'* in her experience. Despite this quote, the student was observed taking care to read the wall text and exhibition labels in a methodical manner before looking at the objects themselves, stating that it was *'pointless'* to view the pieces any other way. These quotes suggest that she does not particularly enjoy the process that she employs when visiting an exhibition, but cannot identify a better way to get the information that she needs.

Another interesting point raised in this visit was that some of the objects on display were also available for purchase in the gift shop. The student stated that *'being able to buy the objects that you see on display depreciates their value'*, and immediately lost interest in the objects that she knew she could purchase.

The accompanied visits in Magnificence of the Tsars also revealed some interesting findings.

The paired students on the accompanied visit stated they were *'happy just to appreciate the aesthetic value'* of the objects, and did not spend a lot of time reading the labels. This is in direct contrast to the student discussed above. However, on a couple of occasions the students were interrupted by their fellows, calling them to look at certain things or telling them information – there was a markedly more positive response to information delivered verbally than there was to the information as available in the labels. This may have been an important element to the *'flow between learning and seeing'* as described above – as in the behind the scenes tours when all the information is given verbally, directly by the curator.

One student criticised a display that held a *'mish mash'* of different types of items, although he also liked a variety of different objects and in the morning's visit to the Theatre collections had been one of the students most interested in a number of different types of objects. This may relate to the student comment in the PMMs that objects did not seem so special when not in an exhibition – in this case, that it is somehow ok for them to be mixed up when in the stores, but when on public display they should somehow be more organised. An exhibition maybe gives students less freedom to make their own meanings, as they expect to be told a story and be given the relevant, and correct, information.

### Group discussion

The group discussion at the end of the day revealed a few basic facts about the students – unsurprisingly, as they had chosen to take part in the research, they were all museum goers who had been to the V&A of their own accord at least once in the last twelve months. They were aware that student groups could gain free access to exhibitions at the V&A, but were unsure of how this could be arranged. The expense of visiting museums was mentioned as a barrier and, as with previous research, a number of students considered that they did not visit with specific projects in mind, but more for leisure, to *'keep*

*up with the times', considering that things they see might 'crop up' in their work later on. This relates to Dineen and Collins discussion of an incubation period, whereby 'after a period of focused attention on the problem, the individual spends a period of time away from it... Research suggests that time spent away from the work allows the brain to relax. This in turn releases alpha waves which are related to lateral and divergent thinking, facilitating the 'eureka' moment' (Dineen and Collins 2005: 45).*

Part of the discussion focused around the issue of 'choice'. The different ways that curators and designers think about and categorise objects was discussed in some detail. One student responded to this quote by saying *'we haven't got the knowledge, probably'* but was contradicted by another student saying *'well, we've got a different one'*.

*'we are thinking I would want this type of thing and this type of thing, whereas they are actually thinking about it in terms of dates or theatres or something else, it is a different kind of categorisation'*

There does, however, appear to be a dichotomy between what students say they want, and what they are prepared to do to achieve this. A couple of students expressed a desire to be able to have more input into a behind the scenes visit:

*'if there was a database... then we could suggest actual pieces'*

This was despite attempts by the researchers to get students to look at the object database that is currently on the V&A website. When asked in the group discussion about the object database on the website, and the opportunity to ask the curator to see specific objects, one of the students responded:

*'I think most people here will be visually triggered so it is quite hard to get into that research to try and find out about things'*

They discussed a different kind of object database, and the different kinds of key words or search options that could be used – and while the V&A website database is certainly far from perfect, it did seem to me that much of what they spoke about the museum is already trying to achieve. There is an issue with students being unwilling to use tools that they have categorised as involving *'an academic written kind of language'* that is not comfortable for them.

The students were very positive about the contact the visit had given them with a curator, and the knowledge that the curator had of the stores and the objects in them:

*'when she brings over the boxes and goes, oh I know what I was going to show you and she picks out something completely nondescript and it could be anything but she knows exactly what's in the box, that's exciting'*

One commented that:

*'we wouldn't have more choice in the behind the scenes, because you are still being shown what they want you to see which is the same as an exhibition but just not quite as immaculate'*

It is important that this is reflected on – the issue of 'choice' is again a key aspect of what students considered a good experience to consist of.

## **Reflection**

This project was designed to gather a body of evidence about what the Higher Education design community wants and needs from 'behind the scenes' access to the museum, addressing the following CETLD criteria:

- Learning spaces: to better understand the museum as learning space, and investigate the idea of situated learning
- Practice-based learning: looking at fresh ideas to the idea of practice-based learning within the museum
- Student-centred approach: to engage with students in an investigation of their needs
- The use and application of collections: examining different possibilities of ways to use the collections for design students

Drawing together the different strands of this research is not easy. As the sections above demonstrate, there are a number of different angles to consider. This section will reflect on the most important of them, based on the above ideas of learning spaces, practice based learning, and the use and application of collections.

Museums are often considered to be 'associated learning spaces', along with galleries and libraries (Boys 2007). They may not be formal learning spaces, such as are found at universities, but they are also not intermediary spaces such as parks or cafes.

Established designers often cite museum experiences as key to their development, and this report has already commented on the issue of communities of practice. Museums and their staff should be a key part of the creative industry community of practice, as designers, and Design tutors and students are.

The idea of situated learning is important, especially with reference to the transmission of information within a museum. The research with students reveals areas where they struggle to engage with the museum in its normal, public-facing work. This is usually manifested in problems accessing information through text labels and text-based databases, which is the most common way curators have for disseminating information about objects.

A behind the scenes visit fulfils the two main principles of situated learning: an element of social interaction, and the presentation of knowledge in an



authentic context. Seeing and interacting with the curator in the stores is a crucial part of the behind the scenes experience. This is demonstrated in the general fascination with the 'experience' demonstrated by students, and positive comments about the curators. In this experience, the curator offers context and knowledge in person which is very important – in a gallery they offer it through text. Students are keen to engage with curators as the source of this information, and the opportunity to ask questions is appreciated. However, an exhibition also seems to convey an added layer of authority, and it would be a mistake to think that one can or should replace the other. Both provide valuable experiences, as outlined below:

What an exhibition gives that a behind the scenes tour does not:

- Insight into curatorial judgement – the way objects are displayed, and the information that is given about them
- Information strengthened by its public availability
- More freedom, less time constrained
- Easy to access

What a behind the scenes tour gives that an exhibition does not:

- Contact with the curator - chance to get questions answered
- More personal experience, more freedom to make own meanings
- Thrill of getting what most people don't
- Information available in alternative formats to text

Other methods of communication also need to be considered. The growth of the internet and new technologies over the past decade has taken place at the same time that the idea of a 'lifelong learning agenda' has developed (Stanier, 2007; 56). Both Keene and the RIN reports (both 2008) state the importance of providing information online, while also acknowledging that this is not a substitute for actual engagement with the objects. Stone also states that 'while a virtual visit is not the same as an actual museum experience, users can learn much about artefacts in institutions around the world' (Stone 2001: 73). It is nonetheless worth considering what role technology can play in providing different kinds of access to museums and their objects.

In the original discussion of situated learning, the question of what knowledge a behind the scenes context encapsulates, and how learning about it helps Design students achieve their goals, was identified. The research with students revealed a number of interesting issues. However, there was still no overall sense of how a behind the scenes visit benefited them as Design students. The research with tutors provided a much better idea of this, as reported by Cynthia Cousens:

*It was felt that the visits broaden students' general vision in art and design culture, deepened existing knowledge and led to discovery of new knowledge which was often gained through a serendipitous process. That surprise and self-discovery, led to ownership of knowledge and the development of the student as an independent researcher.*

*The tutors perceived value in behind the scenes visits in contributing to the development of concepts and visual ideas in the student work; in gaining knowledge, especially tacit knowledge of materials and process used in the making of objects; and in engaging in historical and contextual debate stemming from the artefacts. In addition, handling of the artefact away from the formal display served to place it within the students' own context and contribute to a deeper learning. Study of exemplary pieces and their manufacture also positively changed student perception of their own ability.*

This gives a very clear idea of the areas where a behind the scenes visit does benefit students.

The idea of a museum as a learning space is closely linked to the idea of practice-based learning and the use of collections. The above quote from Cousens reports the importance of handling artefacts to students' learning. This is backed up by the student who had attended a handling session, which had gained a different value to her. This is an important issue for tutors and students, and one that comes up again and again – touching, not being allowed to touch, or almost being allowed to touch, was mentioned by a number of students.

There are understandable concerns on the part of the museum and restrictions on handling objects. Museums have a duty of care to their objects and they are primarily responsible for protecting and caring for them. However, they are also responsible for allowing and facilitating access to them. Both of the curators involved in the behind the scenes tours emphasised that access is available to students working on specific projects, if they make appointments to see specific objects that are relevant to their project. The issue of how such opportunities are advertised is important.

Part of the problem may be the apparent difficulty students have in expressing what they need. One tutor commented that the idea of an appointment, as the curators described, is difficult for artists, because you have to limit yourself to a few objects when you don't necessarily know what it is that you want to see. Empirical studies have indicated that *'the learning styles of designers are systematically different from those of other professional groups'* (Caban 2005: 2). This is one issue where neither side seems able to compromise. There are fundamental differences between institutional cultures that make working together difficult – museums systems are often designed to minimise 'risk taking' as described below, whereas Design education systems aim for the opposite:

*'Within art and design education, creativity is the raison d'être. Philosophically and pedagogically, UK art and design institutions continue to provide teaching and learning environments within which individuals are encouraged to develop their creativity through experimentation and risk-taking'* (Dineen and Collins 2005: 44).

It is, however, clear that such experiences are valuable enough that museums and universities should work together and try to find a compromise. Behind

the scenes visits are an important alternative way for students to gain access to the resources of a museum. This research project revealed enthusiasm from participating students and tutors, as well as from a number of museum staff, for working through the challenges and towards a shared goal of greater participation. The final two sections of this report address the practical challenges and some recommendations of ways to combat these.

## Challenges

- The museum research demonstrates clearly that the resources and opportunities that museum staff consider they are offering are not being effectively communicated to the public. For example, the tutor research included '*a request for provision of information: for example that which could be accessed before the visit on the collections, or items to be viewed; or simply exhibition publicity produced by the museums; or iGuides or trails around the collections and galleries*'. The museum research demonstrated a belief on behalf of museum staff that much of this exists already, but the website/phone research showed equally clearly that this information was not easily accessible.
- The reactive nature of much university/museum engagement causes problems from a number of points of view:
  - planning distribution of resources within the museum, including allocation of space and curatorial/educational staff time
  - planning distribution of resources from a university point of view, including what they can expect from the museum (in terms of space and staff time) as well as planning their own time and that of their students
  - creating a sustainable service when much contact is ad-hoc and unreported on
- Encouraging compromise between both sides. Both tutors and museum staff agree that it is important that any museum experience is connected to students' learning, but there is a question mark over the best way to achieve this. Individual Design courses in any given subject, such as 'Fashion' vary in content considerably between institutions. This impacts upon the ability of museum staff to create transferable resources or opportunities that fit with students' often narrow definition of what is relevant to them. Tutors and students are clear that they consider trips more effective when students can have input into what they see – specific pieces or, at the least, specific kinds of pieces. This involves both the pre-visit data available (online etc.) and the willingness of museums to engage with a process of negotiation.
- There also appears to be tension within museums between education and curatorial departments as to who should lead on, or take responsibility for, this kind of access. Education staff often have limited access to areas such as object storage.

- Student engagement. The students who took part in this research were engaged and articulate. However, the trouble we experienced recruiting students to take part (in this and other CETLD projects, including the baseline research and the Student Placement Project) is at odds with their expressed desires. Research demonstrates the potential value of access to museums, and effort needs to be put into getting this message to students.
- Communities of practice. If we believe that museums have an important role to play in both creative industries and university communities of practice, we need to consider ways to facilitate this engagement.

## Recommendations

- The following are identified benefits of behind the scenes access and should be disseminated and considered when planning student visits:
  - Broadens students' vision of art and design culture
  - Allows a process of surprise and self-discovery, and contributes to the development of the student as an independent researcher
  - Provides an alternative arena for engagement with objects and curatorial expertise
  - Gives students freedom to make their own meanings
  - Possibly provides handling opportunities but, even if not, the chance to get close to objects
  - Allows students to consider different contexts and develop a tacit knowledge of materials and processes
  - Positively changes student perception of their own ability
- Interpretation is important to a successful behind the scenes experience, and in order to maximise the benefit there should be input from museum and university educators as well as curatorial staff. The Design Factory programme at the Design Museum is a good example of such collaboration. Tutors need to be explicit about what they want to achieve with behind the scenes access – tutors actually get to see the end results, while museum staff often only see the time and effort that goes into organising the visit, with little feedback or results available. Developing communication channels are important here.
- This could be organised around the development of a planned museum service. Moving from a reactive system to an actively planned system would help stabilise both the university and museum resources used (including both space and time) and allow these to be predicted more accurately.
 

This might involve museums providing:

  - a programme of behind the scenes tours
  - a programme of student-focused object talks
  - a programme of facilitated handling sessions

An advertised annual timetable of museum access events could be planned into university timetables and would both impact positively

upon student engagement and allow a larger number of students to benefit from privileged access.

- The internet is a resource that should not be ignored. As Keene (2008) and RINS (2008) also recommend, museums should concentrate on making more collections information available online. Where possible, different formats to text should also be considered. The flexibility of the internet should also be used to consider elements of alternative classification, for example.
- Museums need to consider carefully the way that they present information about their resources. One student commented that a podcast of the archives *'looking at how [objects] are pulled down and looked at in detail'* would be a really good idea. This is very similar to the 'behind the scenes' pages on the conservation part of the website (see Appendix 7). If the front page of a museum website had a 'behind the scenes' link then this could send visitors to information about both potential on-site access (including research appointments, object talks, and tours), and on-line or alternative resources (such as podcasts or case studies).

#### Specific recommendations for the V&A:

- Advertise public events such as the demonstration programme more widely.
- Advertise the availability of research appointments more widely, making it clear what access is available.
- Review student/tutor use of the website and consider ways to make this more user-friendly, including support on how to plan and prepare for a museum visit.
- L&I and curatorial departments to work together to review the talks and store visits offered by V&A staff, as originally scheduled for 2008, and to work together towards a sustainable system.

This research demonstrates that behind the scenes access is a valuable component of a Design student's learning experience within the museum. It is also of value to museums seeking to increase access to their collections and build strong relationships with their audiences. The access that does happen today is valuable and often exciting, but limited in scope. Both curatorial and museum staff need to work with university tutors to develop ways that this important access can be extended to benefit a greater number of students. The development of a successful and sustainable service will require the commitment of resources and time, but has the potential to yield significant benefits to all stakeholders.

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## Appendix 1 Interview protocol for museum staff

Introduction of project:

The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD) is a Higher Education Council (HEFCE) funded project. This project is looking at the museum as a learning space for HE design students, and investigating the issue of 'behind the scenes access' to museums – something that design students see as key to their experience. We are investigating both sides of the issue, so I am grateful to you for giving up your time to answer a few questions about these issues.

1) What does the phrase 'behind the scenes access' mean to you? *(Prompt)*  
*In the context of the museum and visitors in general, and regarding HE students? Stores, conservations, offices, objects, handling etc.*

2) Can HE groups be brought to the name of museum? *Do they formally visit?*

2a) If yes, do they need to be/how are they booked in?

3) Are you aware of whether *name of museum* offers 'behind the scenes access' to HE students? *In the form of tours or other provision?*

4) If yes – how is this managed? – *i.e. a regulated programme, through personal contacts – probe for further detail.*

5) What access can students get during their visit?

Free entry to paying exhibitions?      Yes       No

Access to stores?      Yes       No

Access to handling collections?      Yes       No

Access to curatorial staff?      Yes       No

Other *(please*

*specify)*.....

.....

6) If no – do you know why not? - *is it a policy? Has no one ever asked? Is it a resources issue – staff time, space, stores not on site, other?*

7) Do you think that the museum should offer behind the scenes access? *On a limited basis (students only), or other.*

8a) Is photography or filming allowed?      Yes       No

8b) Is drawing allowed?      Yes       No

8c) Are there facilities such as a seminar/meeting room that can be hired/booked?

Yes       No

Further information (cost/number of students etc.)

.....

.....

**Appendix 2**  
**Website Research Questions**

Does the website contain information on the following:

1. Can HE student groups be brought to the museum?

Yes                       No

2. Do they need to be booked in?

Yes                       No

3. How does this happen?

The website supplies a telephone number

They can be booked online

Other.....  
.....

4. Is there a dedicated education officer, or point of contact for HE groups?

.....  
.....

5. Is there a limit to the number of students in a group?

Yes                       No

(If yes, what is the limit?.....)

6. What access can students get during their visit?

Free entry to paying exhibitions?              Yes               No

Access to stores?                                      Yes               No

Access to handling collections?              Yes               No

Access to curatorial staff?                      Yes               No

Access to conservation?                      Yes               No

Other (*please specify*).....  
.....

7a. Is photography or videoing allowed ?              Yes               No

7b. Is drawing allowed?                              Yes               No

7c. Are there facilities such as a seminar/meeting room that can be hired/booked?

Yes               No

Further information (cost/number of students etc.)

.....  
.....

8. How easily accessible is this information? i.e. how quickly could you find all the information you needed

0-10 minutes  10-20 minutes  20-30 minutes  30+ minutes

9. Is there travel information available?

About public transport

About parking for minibus/coaches

No

Other.....  
.....

10. Any other comments about the website? Layout/ease of use/amount of information etc.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Telephone Research Questions

Introduction of project:

Hi, I'm a design tutor at the University of Brighton. I'm currently working on a research project looking into behind the scenes access to museums for HE students, and I wondered if you could spare a few moments to answer some questions about the student service that *name of museum* provides?

1. Can HE groups be brought to the museum?

Yes  No

2. Do they need to be booked in?

Yes  No

3. What is the best way to arrange this kind of visit? (booking/transport to museum)

.....  
.....

4. Is there a dedicated education officer, or point of contact for HE groups?

.....  
.....

5. Is there a limit to the number of students in a group?

Yes  No   
(If yes, what is the limit?.....)

6. What access can students get during their visit?

- |                                   |                              |                             |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Free entry to paying exhibitions? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Access to stores?                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Access to handling collections?   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Access to curatorial staff?       | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Access to conservation?           | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (*please specify*).....  
.....

7a. Is photography or filming allowed ? Yes  No

7b. Is drawing allowed? Yes  No

7c. Are there facilities such as a seminar/meeting room that can be hired/booked?

Yes  No

Further information (cost/number of students etc.)

.....  
.....

**Post Telephone Research Comments**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Appendix 3 Museum literature

This section gives some examples of different kinds of access offered by various UK museums, as made public in leaflets or booklets from the institutions.

- The Manchester Museum, Collective Conversations Postcard  
  
‘share and create your own stories about objects... You don’t need to have an object in mind – we can take you behind the scenes to explore and research items not usually seen... each story is developed into a filmed conversation... Anyone can take part’.
- Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, The Museum Collections Centre leaflet  
  
‘one of the biggest museum stores in the country... an Aladdin’s cave... you can see these collections by appointment or on special Open Days.. Birmingham can now provide access to many of these ‘unseen’ collections’.
- Museum of London, Friends News January-March 2009  
  
‘The London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre... recently started a new volunteer inclusion project... A total of fifty volunteers will join the LAARC team over two ten-week programmes; they will get the chance to handle real archaeology while developing their own skills via specialist-run workshops’.
- Brighton & Hove Museums Events January-April 2008  
  
‘Tuesday 3 April  
**Please Touch!**  
Brighton Museum Link Room  
*1-2pm Free drop in*  
Handle and examine little black dresses from the Costume & Textiles collection, in association with the exhibition *Little Black Dress*’.
- Glasgow Galleries Guide 2008  
  
‘Glasgow Museums Resource Centre  
Public Tours  
Daily at 2.45pm  
  
Ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes at Glasgow Museums? Join us as we explore the stores and discover some of the hidden gems in the City’s collections....’

## Appendix 4 University of Brighton Tutor Interviews

This is research project funded by the CETLD. It is called 'Behind the Scenes' and developed from comments made in the Baseline Research that was carried out at the V&A in Autumn 2006. I am working with Beth Cook from the V&A.

This project is looking at the museum as a learning space for HE design students, and investigating the issue of 'behind the scenes access' to museums – something that design students see as key to their experience. We are investigating both the museum and the HE side of the issue, so I am grateful to you for giving up your time to answer a few questions about these issues.

Subject.....

1) Do you, or have you, taken your students to museums, or suggest that they visit them?

Yes, arrange trips  Yes, suggest students visit in their own time  No

2) If yes – what museums do you visit/tell them to visit? Do you do this every year?

2a) Why do you take your students/tell your students to go to museums?

3) If no – can you tell me why you don't? i.e. not enough time, museums too far away, don't consider it important.

4) Can you think of anything that a museum could provide or do that would help to support a visit with students?

5) What does the phrase 'behind the scenes access' mean to you in the context of visiting museums?

*To be ticked if they mention them*

Visiting stores

Speaking to curators

Handling sessions

Privileged access to exhibitions

Other

6) Have you ever tried to arrange a behind the scenes visit for you and a group of students to a museum?

Yes  No

To the V&A?

Yes  No

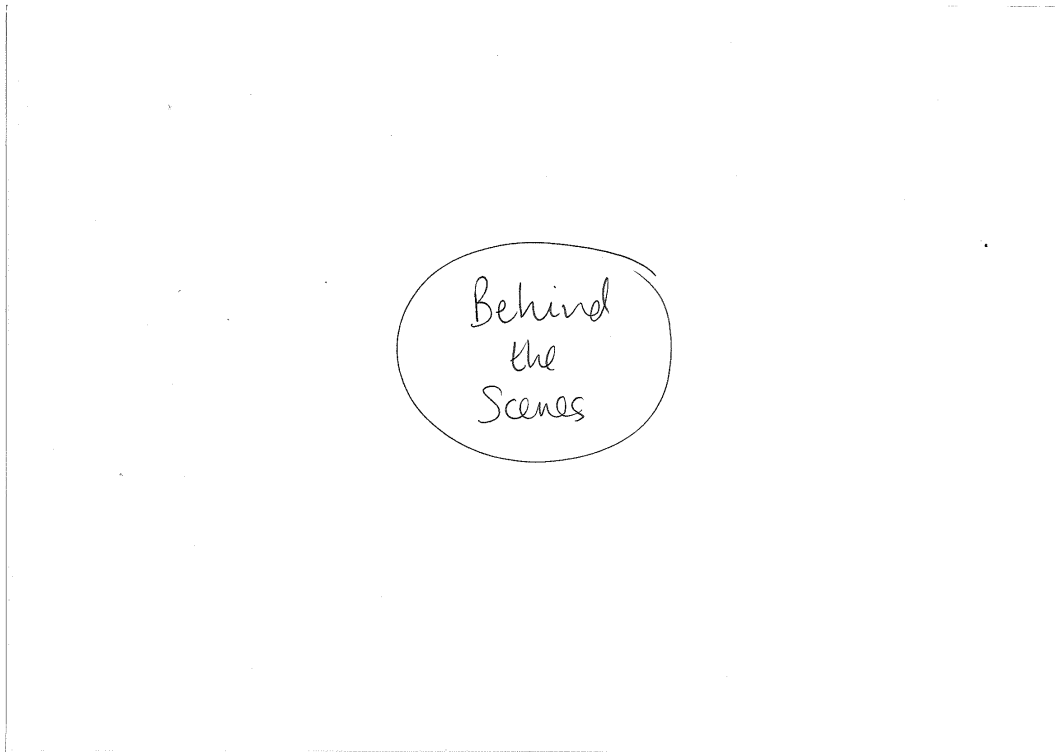
6) Was this successful? (Planning and completing)

7) Do you think that 'behind the scenes access' to museums would be beneficial to your students as they learn about design? Either way, can you say why?

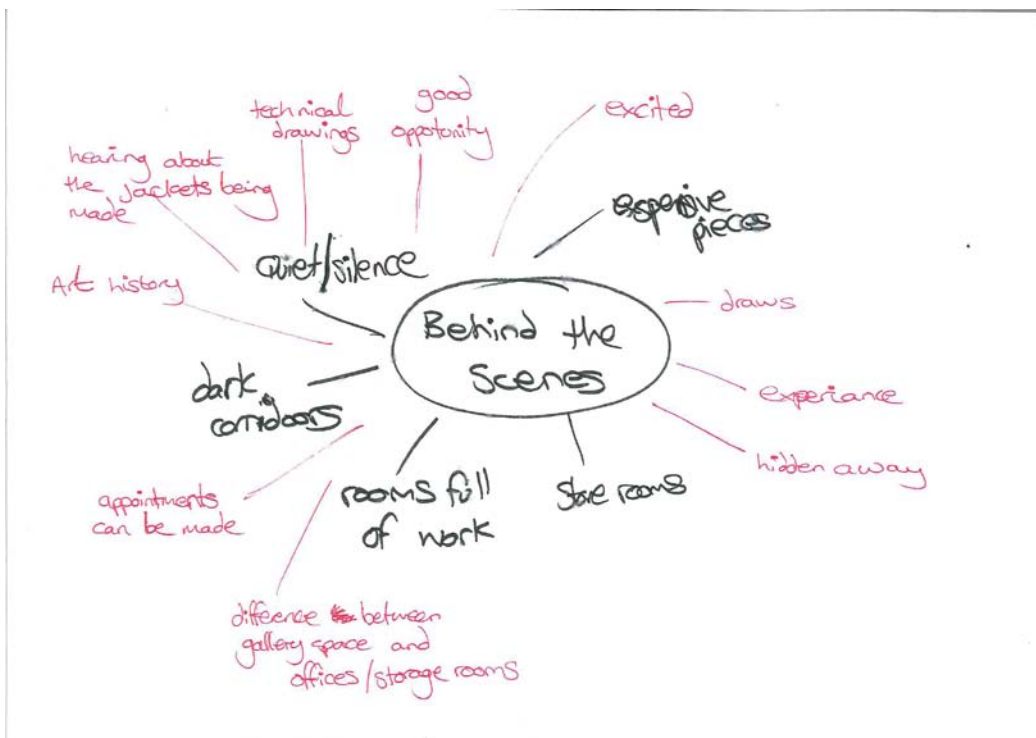
8) If behind the scenes access was more readily available, would this be preferable to other kinds of trips to a museum?

## Appendix 5 Personal Meaning Map examples

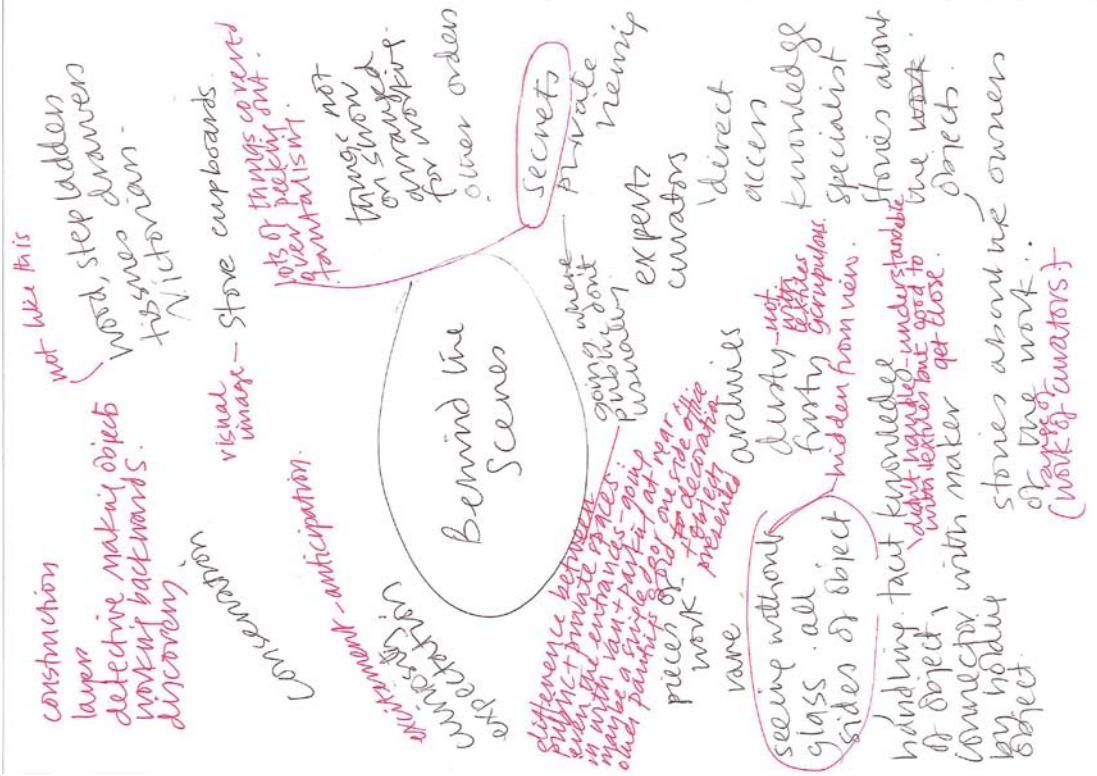
### Blank Personal Meaning Map



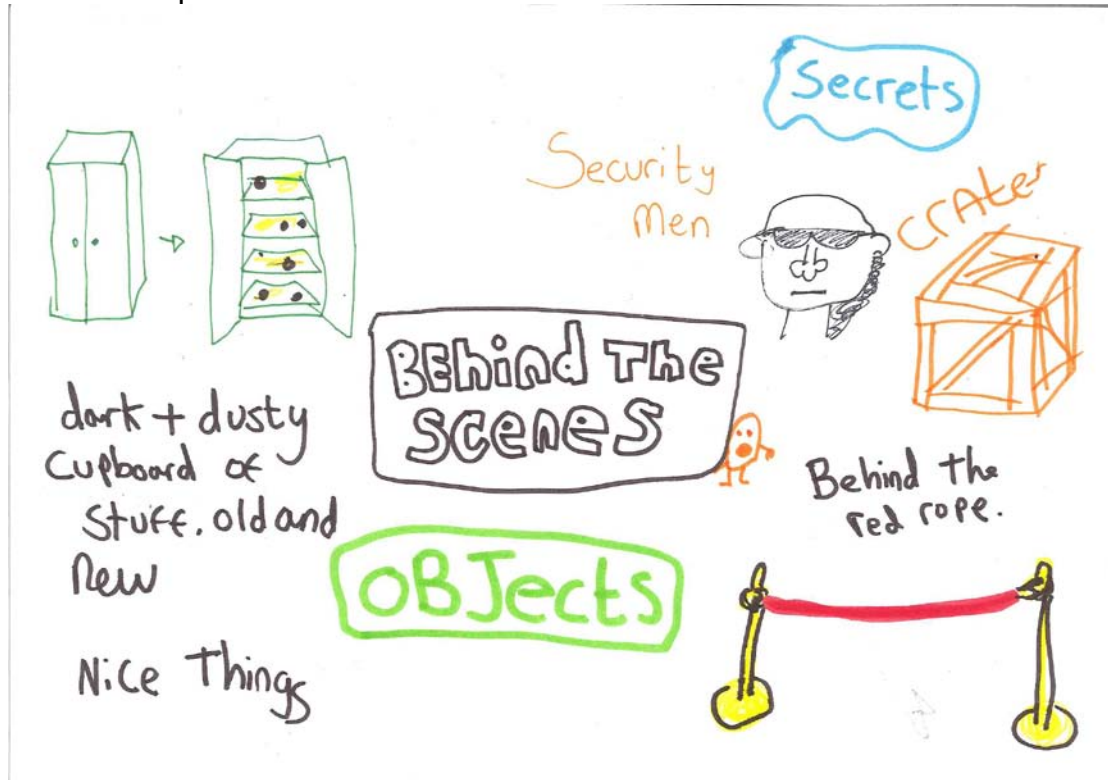
### Complete personal meaning maps



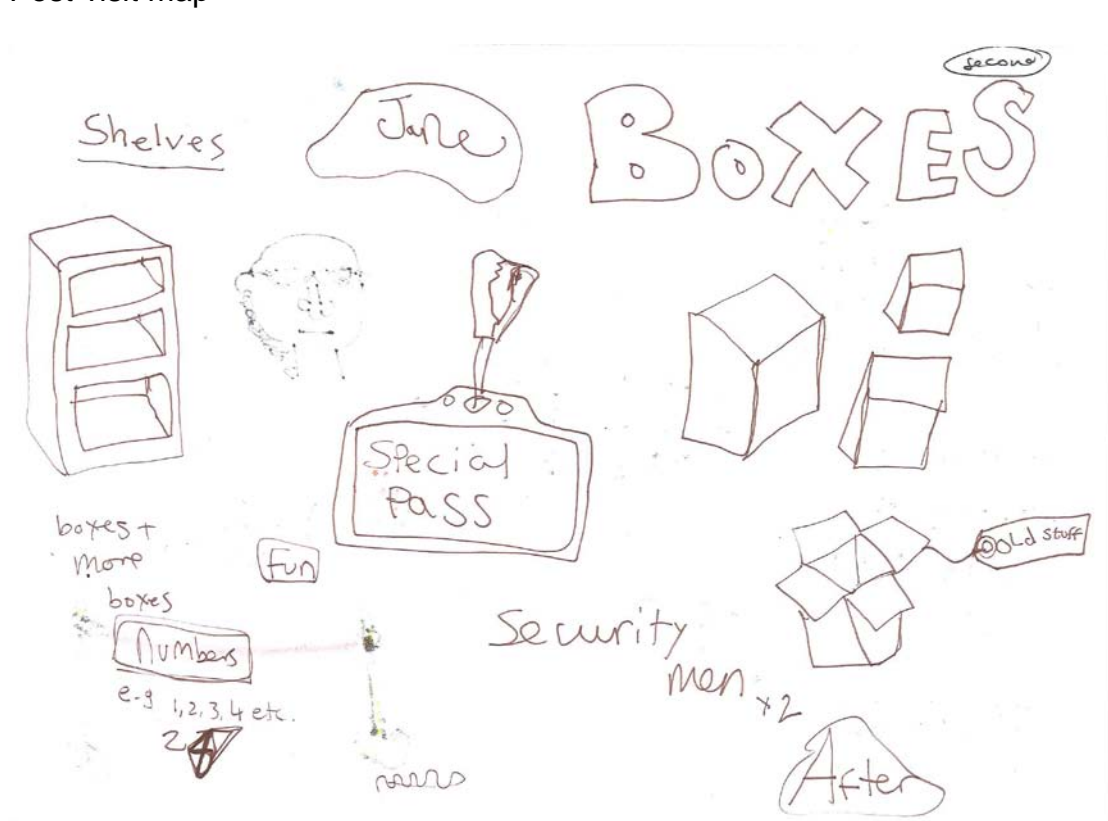




Pre-visit map



Post-visit map



## **Appendix 6**

### **Group discussion protocol**

1. Do you consider that you visit museums?
2. Have you been to the V&A before? Have you been in the last year?
3. Do you go to museums as part of your studies?
4. Does your tutor recommend things to see, or do you choose things that interest you?
5. Is there a difference to visiting museums as part of your studies, and visiting museums as a leisure activity?
6. What did you think of the Behind the Scenes visit?
7. Do you think visits like this are useful to you as design students?  
(Expand on yes and no answers)
8. Do you think that this kind of visit, if it was more readily available, would be preferable to other kinds of trip?
- (9. How did it compare to the visit to the temporary exhibition)
10. What could the V&A do that would be more useful to you, as design students?
11. What resources could it provide?

## **Appendix 7**

### **Other related work**

During the course of this project the CETLD V&A team have come across other relevant work taking place in the same area. Although it has not always been possible to build on this or work with other people, this is a valuable reference list which often backs up the findings of this research.

#### CETLD Offsite-Insight Project

This project examines the use of the V&A's and RIBA's architecture collections as a resource for HE students and tutors (Duncombe 2008). Key findings from work with students that are useful to consider in the context of this research are as follows:

- Virtual and physical experiences of visiting the collections are seen by students as different but complimentary. Virtual access to resources was seen as useful primarily for planning and researching visits or topics. However the physical experience of seeing original objects had the greatest impact and long-term impact on students' learning and own work (Duncome 2009: 8).
- Students who viewed drawings in the study room commented they were able to focus and observe more detail in the actual drawings than online or when looking at objects in the galleries (Duncome 2009: 9).
- Means of interpretation are limited. Students recognised the value of facilitators, museum experts and curators. They feel they have limited design history and contextual knowledge to be able to 'place' objects and understand their eminence or historical, cultural or design impact (Duncome 2009: 11).
- The visits had greatest impact when integrated into coursework by tutors (Duncome 2009: 13).
- Students (and HE Tutors) would like support on how to research and plan for a visit in advance (Duncome 2009: 21).

#### CETLD - Collecting Experiences: enriching design students' learning in the museum Symposium

This one day symposium was held at the V&A in April 2009, organised by Catherine Speight of the CETLD and Debbie Flint of the ADM-HEA. This is being followed up with a special edition of the ADM-HEA Networks magazine, allowing further dissemination.

This day included a number of presentations on three highly relevant themes:

- Learning from experience: close encounters with museum artefacts
- Collaborations: creating partnerships to enhance students' learning
- Resources: developing objects, activities and projects for learning about and from museums

The Learning from Experience strand included presentations that addressed the subject of behind the scenes access. Many of the conclusions fit very well

with CETLD experience and the results of the Behind the Scenes project. Some of the key points are included below:

London College of Fashion (LCF 2008)

Key points from the presentation included:

- Objects do not need to be rare or extravagant in order for students to learn from them.
- Archives need a purpose and identity: a collection of unconnected objects can be useful for designers, but ones with context provide much more.
- Issues around the 'wow' factor of providing access v. the importance of looking after the collection.
- Importance of students seeing objects in an imperfect condition sometimes.

University of Staffordshire (UoS 2009)

From a Design point of view the Senior Lecturer reported that their handling collection is valuable in helping students from varying backgrounds engage with the subject when they may have trouble with traditional essays etc. The handling aspect allows students to learn about important things such as why certain kinds of clothes are made from particular materials, for example.

One successful example of a way the collection was used with design students was with a set of crockery that was borrowed. The students were tasked to set it up in the workshop as though for a tea party, and the tutor commented that they seemed to find it much easier than to settle down and draw the items than on other occasions when they had been taken into a museum to draw in the galleries.

One of the key questions that followed this session addressed the ways that students access both the London College of Fashion and the University of Staffordshire collections. Both sets of presenters agreed this was a challenge. The LCF promotes their collection through an online website, displays around the building, and a targeted induction for academic staff. The UoS gives all their students an induction session. Word of mouth was cited by both sets of presenters as key to their users.

CETLD - Student Placement Programme

The research carried out by Catherine Speight for the Student Placement Project is detailed in the final report for that project. However, the joint research strategy helped this research to inform and enrich the behind the

scenes research by providing a detailed exploration of student learning in a behind the scenes environment.

### CLIP-CETL

The CLIP-CETL (Creative Learning in Practice CETL), based at the University of the Arts London ran a project called 'Tell Us About It', a joint project with the CLIP-CETL and the Diversity Team at the University of Arts. This project ran over 2 years and worked with 30 students. The aim of the project was to get students to answer 3 questions:

- 1) What were the challenges you faced and how did you overcome them?
  - 2) What helped you learn?
  - 3) Can you share any tips or strategies for other students?
- (Finnigan 2008: 10)

The students responded in any way they wanted, and the final pieces ranged from written work to photo books, mind maps, artefacts, a board game and video clips (Finnigan 2008). These pieces were then made into an exhibition and are being archived into the University's collections.

### Conservation: Behind the Scenes V&A website

This section of the V&A website contains 13 case studies of conservation work that the Collections Department has undertaken, ranging from cleaning the chandelier in the main entrance, transporting sculptures, conserving a wedding dress to the process of marking museum objects with their numbers (V&A 2009). These case studies are all accompanied by pictures explaining different stages of each process, and provide an insight into many of the areas of museum practice that tutors and students claim they are interested in. It is also the first page that comes up if you search 'behind the scenes' on the V&A website.

### Effective Collections

The Museums Association *Effective Collections* programme builds on the *Collections for the Future* report (Wilkinson 2005) which argued that 'it is not enough for a museum to simply acquire and preserve a collection: the job of a museum is to make sure that the collection gets used' (Cross 2009: 3). This programme is mainly focused around making collections accessible through increasing loans, transfers, and other forms of disposal as opposed to providing access to stores, but it does show that there is growing acceptance of the idea that storing things for posterity is no longer reason enough for the existence of a collection. It makes the valid point that although 'people in museums tend to agree with this idea in principle [of doing more with their collections], museum's activities with collections often don't reflect these ambitions' (Cross 2009: 6).

## Object-based learning

The V&A CETLD team attended an 'Object-Based Learning in Higher Education' day at University College London in April 2009. Although not specifically based around Design subjects, there were nonetheless some interesting things to consider from a practical point of view regarding providing access to collections. These included the following:

- Competition with other resources: how to make objects easily accessible at short notice
- Logistics – setting, timing, access within the group (few objects, many people), value for effort, 'recording' (what students get from the experience and how they record and recall this', follow up.
- Pedagogical issues related to 'facilitating' rather than 'lecturing'.
- Object based learning needs to be integrated into courses – if it is optional, students will think that it is not important. This relates very closely to the problems that CETLD has had in recruiting students to take part in research projects.

## 'Old Roots Nu Shoots' V&A Behind the Scenes photodocumentary project

This project took place in 2007, run by Laura Elliott from the Learning & Interpretation Department, in conjunction with a historian, a photographer, and a film-maker, as well as a representative from 'Connect Youth' at the British Council and V&A curatorial staff (Culture24 2008). It worked with 10 excluded young people and gave them the opportunity to research hidden histories in the V&A stores. Museum stores used included Word & Image, Metalwork, Fashion & Textiles, and the stores at Blythe House, Olympia.

The result of the project was a series of curated photographs and a film made by the young people in response to their chosen items.

## Sackler Centre Research

In 2008 the V&A commissioned an external consultant to undertake some focus groups to help with the planning of 'inclusive, relevant and stimulating programming in the Sackler Centre, for young people, aged 14-19' (Fisher 2008: 3). The focus groups talked to a total of 10 young people aged 14-16. Key findings included the following:

- Young people 'are not thinking of creative work as an amusing diversion... If they do it at all, it will be with the idea of acquiring skills which, ideally, will be commercial and will allow them to express their identity' (Fisher 2008: 12).
- The Creative Industries were interesting and admired - 'closely tied to young people's world of products, brands, buildings and media' (Fisher 2008: 14).
- 'Young people can readily acquire onscreen experience... What is a draw are the people and materials which teach you to shape the created product' (Fisher 2008: 16).

## Appendix 8 Project Finance overview

<b>Behind the Scenes at the Museum</b>				
<i>Description</i>	<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Brighton</i>	<i>Actual</i> <i>V&amp;A</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
<b><u>Income</u></b>				
Original Bid	19,981	19,981		19,981
Extension Funding	4,526	4,526		4,526
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>24,507</b>	<b>24,507</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>24,507</b>
<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>				
Transfer to V&A from Brighton BSTM Fund		3,500	3,500	-
Transfer to V&A From G1434		5,414	5,414	-
Project Support Officer	15,164	8,710	5,388	14,098
Research Fellow Costs	2,798	2,032		2,032
UoB Staff	3,000	1,422		1,422
Conference Costs	2,000		243	243
Student / Research Travel	1,500		496	496
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>24,462</b>	<b>21,078</b>	<b>6,127</b>	<b>18,291</b>
<b>Budget Remaining</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3,429</b>	<b>2,787</b>	<b>6,216</b>

As the above table shows, there is currently **£3,429** held at the University of Brighton and **£2,787** held at the V&A – a total of **£6,216** unspent from the project budget.

The main cause of this underspend is the extended timetable of the project, which has meant that dissemination opportunities have been limited.

The money currently held at the V&A will be transferred back to the University of Brighton.



## Appendix 9 Dissemination

The dissemination of this project has been more limited than originally hoped for. Two Design Scholarship Seminars were held at the University of Brighton:

- Cook, Elizabeth. Behind the Scenes at the Museum. Design Scholarship Seminar delivered as part of a series organized by and held at the CETLD, University of Brighton, 9 April 2008.
- Cook, Elizabeth. Behind the Scenes at the Museum. Design Scholarship Seminar delivered as part of a series organized by and held at the CETLD, University of Brighton, 10 June 2009.

The first of these seminars focused on introducing the project, and results from the museum interview phase of research. The second concentrated on results from the student-focused phase of research.

In addition, the project is discussed in *Chapter 7 – The Design Student Experience in the Museum* in the *Looking to Learn, Learning to See* book edited by Beth Cook, Rebecca Reynolds, and Catherine Speight.

The V&A website is currently undergoing a redesign, including work on the online object database. In May 2008 the project fellow met with the company designing this in order to discuss usability issues as identified within this project and wider CETLD work.

The project report is due to be hosted on the CETLD website. Anyone who has expressed an interest in the results of the project has been given this web address.