

# *What's in the Box?*

## Evaluation Report



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## Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key Findings	4
Recommendations	5
Introduction and Context	6
Evidence Base and Report structure	8
Part A: The Volunteer Strand	8
Part B: The Home Educated Children Strand	13
Part C: The LGBTIAQ+ Strand	21
Part D: The Refugee Strand	30
Part E: Final Reflections – Museum Staff	36
Appendices	40

# Executive Summary

This report evaluates the outputs, outcomes, impact and lessons learnt from Hastings Museum & Art Gallery's *What's in the Box?* project, an Arts Council England funded initiative that ran from July 2020 to December 2021.<sup>1</sup> It draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence, including information about project engagement, object documentation, and exhibition visitors, as well as feedback from museum staff, volunteers, participants and stakeholders.<sup>2</sup>

The ambitious and multifaceted project aimed to attract new audiences and partnerships, develop the museum's programme to include community voices in its displays and outputs, expand its reach and impact, and improve the accessibility of its collections.

To achieve this, staff worked with volunteers on-site and remotely to enhance the documentation of the museum's Fine Arts, Natural Science and Social History collections. They also worked with local partners to recruit participants for three separate strand programmes, focused on home educated children and their families, members of the LGBTIAQ+ community, and families from refugee or migrant backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Participants in each strand were invited to engage with bespoke activities, learn about the work of the museum, and contribute to co-created exhibitions.

In spite of the significant challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdowns, the museum's project team worked agilely to minimise disruption and deliver positive results; adapting plans, revising timelines, and shifting between remote and in-person approaches.<sup>4</sup>

Across the project, 18 volunteers successfully documented 3,029 items from the museum's collections, as well as digitally transcribing 6,514 records from its physical registers. Museum staff note that this represents a substantial and beneficial contribution to its ongoing work.

Feedback from volunteers was consistently positive. They reported feeling welcomed, supported and valued by staff, and consistently described the opportunity to handle and record items from the museum's collections as 'rewarding' and a 'privilege'. Most reported having learnt new skills or gained in confidence as a result of their volunteering, and all were happy to recommend volunteering with the museum to their friends or relatives.

In total, 66 participants engaged with the three strand projects. This included 20 children (aged four to 15). As well as taking part in strand activities, participants contributed to 23 creative outputs including three exhibitions that, videos, workshops and events. Which were seen by 15,214 live audiences and 68,843 online unique individual users.

Feedback from strand participants was consistently positive. They reported enjoying the museum-led activities, learning new skills, making new friends, improving their confidence,

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<sup>1</sup> Interim evaluation reports were produced in December 2020 and June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> All project staff, volunteers, strand participants and partners were invited to provide confidential feedback.

<sup>3</sup> Partners included One Home Education Group, Home Live Arts, New Writing South, Half Ten, The Refugee Buddy Project, Hastings Community of Sanctuary, and the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> The museum was closed between 2 November and 6 December 2020, and then between 21 December 2020 and 17 May 2021 (around 195 days).

valuing the work of the museum, feeling proud of their contributions, and being keen to get involved in future projects.

Reflecting on lessons learnt from the project and participant feedback, museum staff are keen to leverage community relationships to increase the diversity of its volunteer group, more closely involve partners in the bidding and planning process for future projects, and further explore how technology can be used alongside in-person approaches to enhance reach, impact and accessibility.

## Key Findings

- In spite of significant challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns, the museum's *What's in the Box* team successfully delivered against the project's key aims.<sup>5</sup> Working agilely, they adapted plans, revised timelines, and pivoted smoothly between remote and in-person approaches to minimise disruption and deliver positive outputs and outcomes.
- Although a smaller number than initially planned due to Covid-19 restrictions, a total of 18 different volunteers documented 3,029 items from the museum's Fine Art, Social History and Natural Sciences collections (580, 1,750 and 699 items respectively). Overall, these volunteers contributed 834 hours across the project, at an average of around 46 hours per volunteer.
- A sub group of volunteers digitally transcribed 6,514 records from the museum's physical registers, spanning a period of 82 years, in under 12 months. This represents a significant achievement, making object records more accessible and accelerating future improvements.
- Around three-quarters of volunteers were female, around four fifths were over 50, and most self-reported being from white or white British backgrounds. This is in contrast to the strand projects, which attracted more diverse participants, particularly in terms of the age, ethnicity and sexual orientation of participants. Museum staff recognise the potential of leveraging the newly created community partnerships to recruit volunteers from more diverse backgrounds.
- Volunteers were typically very positive about their experience and the support that they had received from museum staff. A majority felt they had learnt new skills and improved their confidence. Most wished to continue volunteering and all stated that they would recommend volunteering with the museum to friends or family. A consistent theme in the feedback from volunteers was the 'privilege' that they felt in being able to 'discover', 'handle' items from the collection. In addition, they commonly reported that volunteering provided them with an opportunity to pursue their own interests, whilst contributing to the museum, and learning more about Hastings and its community.
- Overall, there were 15,214 visitors to the three co-curated strand exhibitions. This included 8,679 visitors to the home-educated children strand exhibition, 3,326 to the

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<sup>5</sup> The museum was closed between 2 November and 6 December 2020, and then between 21 December 2020 and 17 May 2021 (around 195 days).

LGBTIAQ+ strand exhibition, and 3,191 to the refugee strand exhibition, which ran alongside the British Museum's Lampedusa Cross touring exhibition.

- The Home Educated Children strand participants were consistently positive about the programme of activities. 85% of individual session ratings were in the highest two satisfaction categories and 96% were positive overall. Adults and children consistently reported enjoying 'finding out about the objects', 'handling' them, 'seeing them close up', and 'learning how to record and conserve them'. Several said it felt 'special' being in the museum without the general public. Some adults also noted that the experience constituted valuable work-related experience, and that the context was ideal for children who are sensitive to multi-sensory environments.
- Feedback from the LGBTIAQ+ strand participants was consistently very positive, with high levels of satisfaction reported in terms of enjoyment, learning, attitudes towards the museum and a desire to work with the museum in the future. In particular, participants noted enjoying 'meeting new people', 'learning about museum processes', and 'working with partners' on a range of 'creative activities'. As well as gaining a level of personal satisfaction from the strand activities, several participants reported that project was an important step in 'making LGBTIAQ+ stories more visible' in the museum and community.
- Participants from the Refugee strand fed back that the project was enjoyable and that they had learnt new skills. Most reported that the project had boosted their confidence, helped them make new friends and taught them about the work of the museum. All those who responded said they would recommend the museum to family and friends and most noted they would like to do projects with the museum in the future.
- Overall, museum staff note that the project had been successful in creating strong and credible relationships with community groups who might not have previously engaged with the museum. As a result of this, and in spite of the challenges of Covid-19, museum staff and participants were able to produce and display creative works that successfully highlighted the stories of diverse individuals and communities.
- In addition, museum staff recognised the value of using technological approaches alongside in-person activities. The use of technology for online workshops and exhibitions, although not without drawbacks, had enhanced accessibility for participants and audiences, whilst the creation of videos had ensured a legacy for the work undertaken. That said, museum staff and participants also recognised the value of the museum as a space itself; a place that provides visibility and legitimacy to the objects and community stories that are shown there.
- Reflecting on the lessons learnt from the project, museum staff noted the importance of involving community partners in bidding processes at the earliest stage in order to better align planned activities with objectives, expectations and available budgetary or human resources.

## Recommendations

Drawing on lessons learned from the *What's in the Box*, it is recommended that museum staff consider:

- a) Utilising the strong partnerships established during the project to encourage individuals from diverse communities to volunteer with the museum, and take part in future projects and programmes.
- b) Setting up a representative 'working group' or non-executive 'advisory panel' to discuss and recommend ways in which the museum might continue to develop programmes that involve and are accessible to a wider audience, and encourage cross-community group working.
- c) Building on the lessons learnt from digital approaches to activities and exhibitions to create opportunities for involving volunteers, engaging participants, and attracting audiences who might not otherwise be able to access the museum and its collections in-person.

## Introduction

This report evaluates the outputs, outcomes, impact and lessons learnt from the Hastings Museum & Art Gallery’s Lottery Funded Arts Council project *What’s in the Box* (WitB).

It covers the period 1 October 2020 to 17 December 2021 and incorporates findings from interim evaluation reports presented to the museum in December 2020 and June 2021.

Overall, the WitB project aimed to:

- Develop new audiences and new partnerships
- Develop the museum’s programme to include community voices in its displays and outputs
- Expand its reach and impact, and
- Improve the accessibility of its collections.

The project included recruiting volunteers to support documentation of the museum’s collections, as well as working with home educated children, LGBTIAQ+ and refugee community groups to document collections and organise three co-curated exhibitions.

Table 1: overview of the What’s in the Box project strands

	Volunteer Strand	Home Educated Children Strand*	LGBTIAQ+ Strand	Refugee Strand
1 Oct 2020 to 16 Dec 2021	✓	✓		
16 Dec 2020 to 20 June 2021	✓	✓	✓	✓
20 June 2021 to 17 Dec 2021	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*As a result of disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the home educated children strand was extended by the museum beyond its original scope.

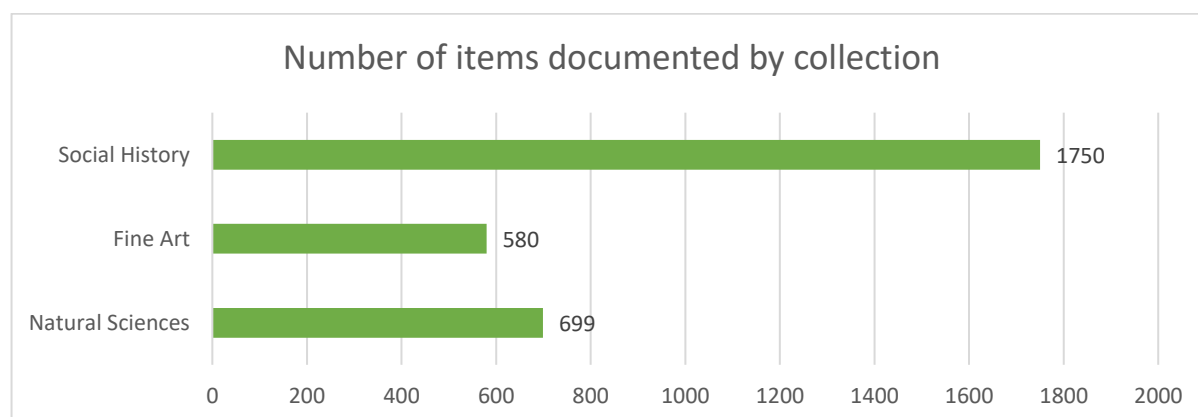
## Evidence base and report structure

The report draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence. This includes reflective discussions with the project team, demographic information about volunteers and strand participants, data on documentation and transcription, analysis of feedback surveys completed by volunteers and participants, and semi-structured interviews with volunteers, strand participants and stakeholders. The report is divided into five parts. Part A focuses on the work of the volunteers; Part B focuses on the home educated children strand; Part C focuses on the LGBTIAQ+ participant strand; Part D focuses on the refugee community group strand; and Part E summarises museum staff’s final reflective feedback. Additional information is included the appendices.

## Part A: The Volunteer Strand

1. Although a smaller number than initially planned due to Covid-19 restrictions, 18 different volunteers participated in the project between October 2020 and December 2021. Around a third of these participated throughout the project with around a third joining since June 2021.
2. Overall, these volunteers contributed 834 hours across the project, an average of around 46 hours per volunteer. Six volunteers contribute up to 20 hours, nine contributed between 21 and 60 hours, and three contributed over 100 hours.
3. Across the project lifecycle, around three-quarters of volunteers were female, around four fifths were over 50, and most self-reported being from white or white British backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> Whilst this is perhaps unsurprising, given the museum's context, it is recommended that the museum team consider how they might make better use of demographic information the partnerships it established during the project to recruit a more diverse body of volunteers.
4. Overall, the volunteers documented 3,029 items from the museum's collections (figure 1). Around three fifths of the items documented were from the Social History collection, and around a fifth from each of the Fine Art and Natural Sciences collections.
5. The project team note that the difference in numbers of items documented by collection relates the level of documentation undertaken with each collection. Objects from the Fine Art and Natural Sciences collections were fully catalogued and photographed. Social History items (mostly boxed documents), were listed for content but not photographed.

Figure 1: Number of items documented by collection, October 2020 to December 2021



<sup>6</sup> Based on self-reported responses to feedback surveys.



6. During the project feedback was collected from 12 of the 18 volunteers through in-person interviews (December 2020), a survey questionnaire (November 2021) and a Zoom, MS Teams or telephone interview (December 2021).<sup>7</sup>
7. Typically, volunteers were very positive about their experience and the support that they had received from museum staff. A majority felt they had learnt new skills and improved their confidence. Most wished to continue volunteering and all stated that they would recommend volunteering with the museum to friends or family (table 2).

Table 2: summary of volunteers' responses to a feedback survey questionnaire

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree *	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy volunteering	8	0	0	0	0
I have been well supported by staff	7	1	0	0	0
I have learnt new skills	4	2	2	0	0
I have gained confidence	3	2	3	0	0
I intend to continue volunteering	7	0	0	1	0
I recommend volunteering with the museum	8	0	0	0	0

\*The respondent is unable to volunteer due to other commitments.

8. Volunteers who spoke to the evaluator or provided written comments identified a number of positive benefits of volunteering with the museum. The views of one of the volunteers helpfully summed up the views of others. They wrote:

*I enjoyed accessing reserve collections and the surprise and wonder that came with the process. Each week we were accessing new items and the process of revealing, cataloguing, photographing and re-packing them was fascinating - I really enjoyed the sense of discovery and care that we were able to give back to items that, in some cases, had not been seen for a long time. During the pandemic the team worked hard to keep in touch and kept us up to date on access plans as they developed.*

9. Volunteers frequently used the word 'privilege' when describing the pleasure they felt in being able to touch, feel and manipulate historical objects, or when describing the excitement of seeing 'behind the scenes' at the museum. Volunteers also appreciated making a contribution to the work of the museum, or learning more about the community where they live. This was true for those with long term connections to Hastings as well as those who were more recent residents.

10. Typical comments from the volunteer feedback included:

*I feel that I am making a permanent contribution to the gallery by doing transcription work.*

<sup>7</sup> All volunteers were offered the opportunity to provide confidential feedback or speak to the evaluator. Four volunteers spoke to the evaluator during a site visit to the museum in December 2020. Eight volunteers responded to a feedback survey during November 2021. Four volunteers spoke to the evaluator via Zoom, MS Teams or telephone in December 2021.

*Seeing and handling historic objects.*

*The Museum's been part of my life since childhood visits to grandma. With strong family connections and a keen interest in history, it's a pleasure to help with the collections.*

*Learning more about my home town.*

*Being able to see all the museum's treasures up close!*

*You get so much more from a museum by having these things in your hand. That experience of handling artefacts is a world away from standing with your nose against a glass case.*

*It's a huge privilege to being party to the wonder of that moment, get a box, unwrap , reveal, care for things often not seen for decades.*

*I love working with other volunteers, great fun, meeting other people, and getting to look at amazing artefacts, hands on.*

*My time volunteering at the Museum is a wonderful opportunity to do something for myself with interesting, supportive people in a lovely, safe environment.*

*It's great discovering more about the local area and the fascinating objects on display. I particularly enjoy handling (with gloves on!) the objects and seeing them so close up - it's a privilege to do that. I also enjoy chatting with the staff and the other volunteers.*

11. When asked, volunteers reported learning new skills or gaining confidence as a result of their volunteering activity. For some this related to museum-specific processes and for some more general IT skills. For others, taking part in an enjoyable, purposeful activity was key to improving their mental health. Representative comments included:

*I gained an understanding of what is necessary to catalogue, store and conserve properly. [Staff] put together interesting training sessions. The level of detail was fascinating.*

*My partner tried for to get me over my fear of Excel. I managed to work at academic studies for 15 years without touching Excel. Five or six weeks at Hastings and it's 'what is all the fuss about?' I've gained a new confidence with Excel.*

*Even a short time volunteering at the museum has considerably improved my wellbeing.*

12. Volunteers were universally positive about the support that they have received from museum staff. They commonly described staff as 'welcoming', 'friendly', and

'approachable'. Volunteers also reported that staff share their passion and excitement and make them feel valued. Typical comments included:

*Thanks to the team for making a great opportunity.*

*The curators have been really good – prepared to be flexible. They will try and pair you up with tasks that interest you.*

*Great, all very welcoming. Everyone there is very passionate about what they do.*

*Thanks to the staff for making me feel valued there.*

*Staff are massively welcoming. There's a feeling of belonging.*

*They are accessible, share our excitement, share our passions.*

*Very welcoming, kind, [I] feel a part of it, [they] greet you by name.*

*Staff are very friendly and patient. It's a pleasure to come.*

13. When asked how the volunteering experience might be improved, volunteers who responded said it was 'great', a 'fantastic opportunity', 'grand right now', 'can't think of anything to be honest', and 'genuinely can't think of any [ways]'.

14. A few suggestions were made, although these were often expressed with caveats and an understanding of the recent restrictions brought about by Covid-19.

- Asking volunteers for ideas on activities prior to changes or decision making
- Creating opportunities for volunteers to work and socialise together
- Introducing volunteers to other museum staff
- Providing volunteers with opportunities to help organise exhibitions
- Updating volunteers if, in the future, collections are made accessible online

15. In addition to their work documenting objects, a sub group of volunteers also digitally transcribed 6,514 records from the museum's physical registers, spanning a period of 82 years across all collections.<sup>8</sup>

16. Museum staff note that this valuable work, initially prompted by a return to remote activity during the second lockdown, represents a significant achievement in under 12 months. It has helped make the object records more accessible and accelerated future improvements. For example, a digitized version of the catalogue will enable museum staff to cross reference and search more efficiently, improving the integrity of documentation, and the reconciliation of objects to their records.

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<sup>8</sup> The museum's registers go back to 1891.

17. Reflecting on the process and its broader value in supporting the work of the museum, the Collections Access Officer commented:

*Having the registers completely digitized is an ideal scenario, especially for inventory work. As it currently stands, some entries are digitized, but a lot aren't, so there are a lot of objects that are in need of reconciliation with the paperwork. Transcription is quite tedious, but it is incredibly helpful because it makes that reconciliation possible.*

*For accreditation we are required to provide core information about every object in our care. Core information includes current object locations and acquisition details. Inventory provides accurate locations, and transcription provides accurate acquisition information. Both workflows are needed to capture core information and improve object records. We are lucky to have volunteers that can do both! I am very grateful to them.*

18. Written feedback from three volunteers indicates that they found the transcription work challenging, interesting and worthwhile. For one volunteer, although recognising its value, the close attention to detail and focus on the computer screen was particularly 'taxing'.

*I've found the transcription work absorbing and challenging. It has taught me a lot both about the history of the Hastings area and about the sort of items in the collection. Having said that, I do miss the experience of actually handling the items in the collection.*

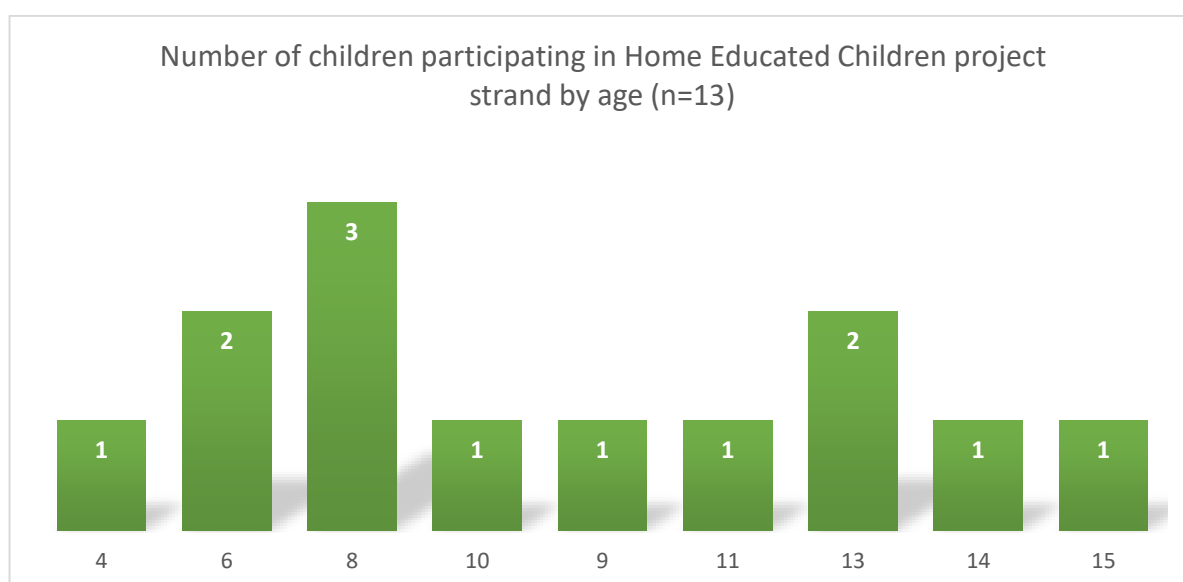
*Happy to keep going with this. Just for the record keeping in touch with you over the lockdown has been great. Lovely to be doing something useful and having contact with the museum. It was fun taking our grandchildren round the museum last Saturday. They loved the mechanicals and stuffed animals.*

*My experience with the remote volunteer activity of transcription was that it was difficult for me to read the handwriting in the images. It took me a long time to transcribe and I found it hard to concentrate. As I already work on the computer a lot during the day, I didn't want to tax my eyes with additional difficult eye projects. So I was only able to do some of the work.*

## Part B: The Home Educated Children Strand

19. The home educated children project strand ran initially from October to December 2020 and then, additionally, from May to August 2021. This second phase, prompted in part by the disruption caused by Covid-19, was initiated by the museum and went beyond its initial commitment.<sup>9</sup> In total, there were 33 separate sessions across both phases.
20. As well as running extra sessions with families, the strand leader also organised three 'Carnival of the Deep' workshops with an external company (see paragraphs 44-45).
21. Overall, ten families participated in the main project. The families were recruited with support from 'One Home Education Group' network coordinator.

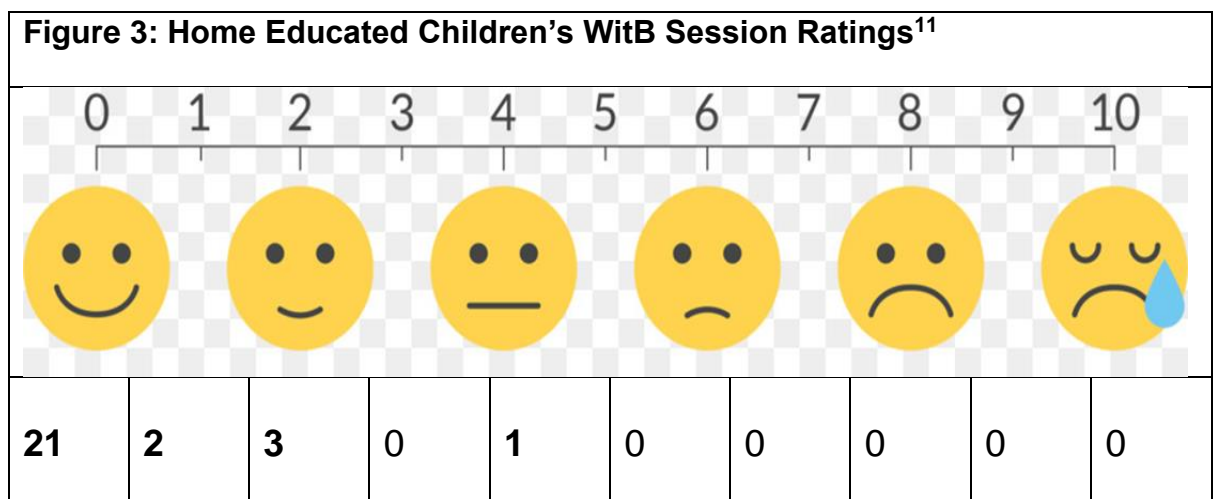
Figure 2: number of children participating in the Home Educated Children strand, by age



22. Initially, families attended sessions at the museum on either Mondays or Tuesdays, whilst one family participated remotely (see case study, p16). Families undertook a range of activities including the documentation of items from the Natural History Collection, learning about taxidermy and creating animations.
23. Three families withdrew for different reasons unrelated to session quality. One parent withdrew due to childcare commitments (the sessions were enjoyed by their eight year old but were too difficult for their four year old). A second parent withdrew during the lockdown period as their six year old child joined an outdoor focused group that clashed with the museum sessions. A third parent withdrew as their child suffers from severe anxiety.

<sup>9</sup> The sessions in phase two have been offered in addition to those originally programmed.

24. As a result of lockdown restrictions, sessions could not take place on site between 2 November and 6 December 2020. During this period, the project team successfully created activities to be completed at home, and the strand lead delivered one remote session online.
25. As a result of a second national lockdown and museum closure (21 December 2020 to 17 May 2021), the in-person sessions were temporarily suspended and the focus was shifted to the strand exhibition which ran ‘virtually’ from 20 March to 20 June 2021 (see paragraphs 37-43).
26. With the reopening of the museum in May 2021, additional in-person sessions ran with five families on Mondays or Tuesdays up to 3 August 2021.<sup>10</sup> These sessions focused on documenting the marine biology collections. Drawing on learning from phase one of the project, the programme of sessions included breaks for holidays.
27. Across the project, the participating families successfully documented 699 objects from the Natural Sciences collections. The items included animal skulls (sloth bear, highland cat, bird, porpoise), marine objects (shells, corals, fish) and fossils.
28. Feedback from participants gathered through face to face discussions (December 2020), session evaluation questionnaires (both phases), and via email, was consistently very positive.
29. At the end sessions, children were invited to rate the event using a 0-10 smiley face scale (figure 3). Sessions were almost always rated positively, with 23 out of 27 ratings (86%) received in the highest two categories, 26 out of 27 in the highest three categories (96%), one in the ‘neutral’ category and none in the lower categories.



<sup>10</sup> This includes four returning families from the first phase of the project and one new family.

<sup>11</sup> Based on feedback for all sessions across the project.

30. Feedback from discussions with participating children and their written comments about the sessions indicated that activities had been fun, varied and interesting. They had also contributed successfully to their learning. In particular, the children noted enjoying:

*Learning about the object, how to keep it stable so it doesn't degrade.*

*Being allowed to handle things.*

*Being able to touch it is different, when you look at it through a glass it is different, when you are handling it is better.*

*Looking at skulls, stuffed animals and whale vertebrae – it was huge!*

*Creating a digital collection of things found in woods.*

*Watching a video on how to make sure objects don't degrade.*

*Seeing the reconstructed Gorilla skull.*

*Paying more attention to things – studying them closer.*

*Looking at bones, measuring, photographing, handling them, seeing how they can go together to recreate a whole thing.*

*Making the repair patches for the stuffed animals for when they get damaged by touching.*

*Seeing how things are catalogued, old things, finding old writing, tiny bones with writing on it and finding out about the person who donated them*

*Being able to see how things work.*

*Widening my interest.*

*Documenting and touching stuff in the museum like crabs.*

*I enjoyed trying to find all the crabs limbs and trying to match them to the right crabs.*

31. Whilst there were very few comments about how the sessions could be improved, some of the children said they would like to opportunities to see more of the museum:

*I liked going around the museum – it would be good to be more active – I like measuring but I also like walking around as well as sitting cataloguing.*

*I want to go more behind the scenes (literally) see the store, how they look after things, care for stuff and how the museum is run.*

32. The parents who were interviewed were also consistently very positive about the museum sessions, both for their children and for themselves. They reported that exploring the boxes and touching the various objects was 'exciting', 'magical', and had 'sparked their interest' in research. In particular they had enjoyed:

*Getting the boxes out, pulling objects out and not knowing.*

*Categorising, measuring, taking photos and trying to guess what things are.*

*Feeling the weight of an object, how heavy it is. Handling artefacts and doing the animations.*

*Taking an idea and running with it; doing a project for the first time finished the year off nicely.*

*Coming in is great and going behind the scenes, doing different things, really interesting.*

*Not just getting the public view, but a deeper level of understanding, felt special.*

*Finding out about the history and story behind it - the how, the where did it come from.*

33. Broadly the parents noted that the sessions were the right length and appreciated that there were opportunities to take breaks. They were keen to do other similar projects in the future and noted how the museum sessions enriched home education. One parent noted that the sessions could have been 'a bit more varied'. However, overall, comments were positive:

*Even if the project ends we would still like to get involved - even if every fortnight.*

*It's mindful and relaxing. Don't want it to end.*

*So lucky to have been part of this project - good memories.*

*We gained so much from the time spent at the museum. It was such fun. [Staff] were so welcoming. I'm so grateful for the way the experience enriched our lives.*

34. One parent noted that there were particular benefits for children in terms of providing them with meaningful experience of the world of work as well as providing opportunities to learn in a calm, personalised environment.

*It's like being a curator – this has been great work-experience, inspired, they're beginning to look at it as a career.*

*It's good for children who are sensitive to multi-sensory, noisy, busy environments. We have come to some things and too crowded. It's a good thing it is busy, but the place is rammed for normal events. Here it's relaxed and easier to get involved.*



35. One participant who had worked remotely but who had joined another family on the day of the evaluator's visit commented that whilst they had done their 'own fun stuff' online they now felt that they had 'missed out'. That said, it was clear from the participant's comments that by working digitally (supported by the museum) they had had unique and interesting opportunities to pursue their interests and shape their activities.
36. For example, using social media they were able to engage with a wider community and connect with an expert who can potentially support the documentation process (see case study).

#### **Case Study:**

Out of all the families that signed to take part in the Home Education Strand of the Project, one was unable to attend physically from the start due to the lockdown rules. It was decided to try out some activities remotely with them using Microsoft Teams to have virtual sessions exploring some of the objects encountered in the museum-based sessions.

The family was invited to engage with the project remotely with 'catch ups' every couple of weeks. The idea was to both enable participation remotely whilst also potentially generating ideas and building confidence in the use of virtual engagement tools. A specific activity was identified that would enable the exploration of objects encountered in the museum and also generating creative outputs.

For example, it was decided that the participants could create an anonymous Twitter account that would serve as a platform for posting information about some of the objects documented during the project. Each week a new object would be explored with a few tweets each week. On one occasion, this attracted attention of a subject matter 'expert' who offered to help with the identification of writing found on one of the showcased bones.

**Parent's Comments:** *My daughter and I set up a Twitter account to share findings from the What's in the Box project. We were not familiar with Twitter and using social media in this way before, so we had to learn as we went along.*

*Using hashtags for the first time was challenging to start with but got easier. We managed to make several tweets, share photos and an animation my daughter made. My daughter enjoyed seeing who liked her posts, who had retweeted and commented. She was excited when she got followers too. We learnt how social media can be used to share information and learn new things. It went better than expected and found it was a good way to research a subject.*

*It was a little challenging not having many photographs of our own to share so we had to try and find copyright free ones online which wasn't always easy. Not having much information about all the fossils beforehand was also tricky as we weren't always sure that what we had found out was relevant to our fossils. However, I would recommend it as a way of learning.*

37. An online exhibition, hosted on ArtSteps, was co-curated by nine home education strand families working with the Collections and Engagement Curator of Natural

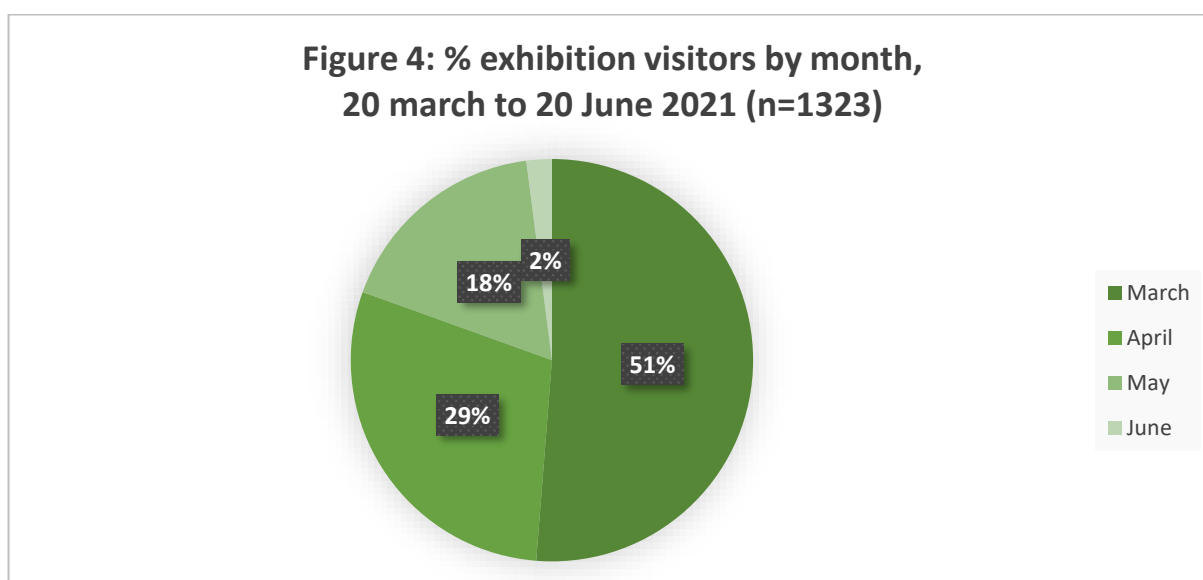
Sciences and the Collections Access Officer at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery (see appendix A).<sup>12</sup>

38. The exhibition, which ran from 20 March to 20 June 2021, included participants' favourite objects from the documentation activities in phase one of the project (i.e. echidna skull, rhinoceros hornbill skull, sloth bear skull, polar bear skull and pilot whale skull), alongside creative outputs from the young people who participated. These include posters (see appendix B), animations, and poems. The exhibition can be viewed at: [What's in the Box?](#)

39. A number of videos were created to help promote the exhibition alongside weekly social media posts on Twitter and Facebook. The videos included:

- A launch video summary of project
- An animation summary
- A first collections short
- A second collections short

40. The exhibition received 1,323 'visitors' (views) up to 20 June 2021 (see figure 4) and 1,442 'visitors' up to 31 December 2021. Perhaps unsurprisingly just over half of the views came in the first month following the exhibitions launch (678), with just under a fifth of views in the final full month (231). Just over a hundred views occurred after the exhibition 'closed'.



41. Reflecting on the online exhibition process, the Home Education strand lead commented:

<sup>12</sup> ArtSteps is a web-based application that empowers creators to build exhibitions, events, and brand storytelling concepts by designing realistic 3-dimensional room complexes. <https://www.artsteps.com/>

*If I had more time there would have been a more complex exhibition with changing elements to reflect the work we [the strand participants] are doing now... There would also be more input encouraged at an earlier stage with more audio narrative from participants in the exhibition and social media. The limited confidence of most of them (added to the limitations of the pandemic) made this difficult, but integrating this at an earlier stage as part of more structured 'homework' may have built their confidence. Overall, time seems to have been a major limiting factor for me as well as the participants.*

42. Parents were also invited to comment on the exhibition. One did so, highlighting their children's enjoyment and how participation had enabled their children to practise IT skills and learn about new online approaches.

*The children really enjoyed taking part in producing something for the exhibition. They learned a lot while they did it, both about the animals they chose to make a presentation about, and the computer skills for using PowerPoint. They were very excited to see their work online in the exhibition. I thought it was very professionally put together and an innovative way to turn the problems caused by lockdown into an opportunity to try something new.*

43. The group also put on a display of the animal specimens they had been working with in the Natural History Gallery. The case included labels and text written by the participants.

44. In addition to the activity sessions and exhibition, the strand lead also organised a series of three 'Carnival of the Deep' workshops on 9, 16 and 25 August 2021. The sessions were attended by a total of 11 adults and 18 children. Feedback from participants was positive with typical comments including 'a great way for kids to use their creativity' and 'amazing, creative, inspirational, and very clever how you managed to involve children of different ages'.



45. Working with [iDOLRiCH TheatreRotto](#), participants learnt about the human made issues affecting the marine environment and made their own puppet theatre performances inspired by the museum's marine animal collection. A video of the 'Carnival of the Deep' was trailed on Twitter and shown on the museum's Facebook page on 12 November.



## Part C: The LGBTIAQ+ Strand

46. The LGBTIAQ+ project strand activities ran over six weekly online sessions from 9 February to 23 March 2021 (see appendix C). Delayed by the Covid-19 disruption, the participants' chosen objects and films were on show via different channels from August to October 2021 (see paragraphs 65-70).

47. The online strand sessions provided opportunities for participants to:

- Explore the relationship between LGBTIAQ+ history, identity and museums.
- Learn about how objects are incorporated into collections and label writing.
- Choose personal objects to include in the project and write labels.
- Learn about script writing processes and create their own scripts.
- Work with filmmakers to create and present films based on personal objects.

48. Individual sessions were led by the LGBTIAQ+ strand lead and the museum's Collection's Access Officer. They were also facilitated by an external consultant specialising in queer history and museums.<sup>13</sup> Discussions, scriptwriting and filmmaking activities were supported by *Home Live Art*, *New Writing South* and *Half Ten* who attended some or all of the sessions.

49. A variety of objects were used to illustrate some of the challenges of managing the museum's collections, drawing on items from the collections alongside rejected donations. These session activities focused on:

- *Unsolicited items vs. active collecting*
- *Information we need vs. information we have*
- *Information that may be out there, but is not attached to the object or the object record*

50. The self-reported demographics for the group was as follows:

- Two participants were under 30, two under 40, one under 50, one under 60 and two over 65.
- Four participants self-identified as female, one as male, one as trans non-binary, one as non-Conforming, and one as unsure.
- Four participants self-identified as lesbian, three as queer and one as bisexual.
- Seven participants self-identified as white British and one as mixed white and black Caribbean.

51. Eight participants successfully completed the filmmaking project, creating works based on their chosen objects and topics [links to the films, which were accessioned into the museum's permanent collection, can be found in Appendix D]. These were:

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<sup>13</sup> E-J Scott - Museum of Transology.

- Print copies of the Hastings and Rotherhithe Rainbow Alliance Newsletter
- A pair of Doc Martin shoes and a pair of Vivienne Westwood Heels
- A collection of 'heartbreak memoirs'
- A mahogany box, made as one of the first female apprentices
- A tapestry
- A drag artist's make-up cleaning wipe
- Post-it notes
- A handmade 'blue plaque' for Marianne North, a Victorian biologist and botanical artist.

52. All films were premiered at the final session. During this session, participants also had opportunities to provide feedback, were encouraged to complete an evaluation questionnaire, and were invited to talk to the evaluator in a subsequent telephone interview.

53. Of the eight participants, seven completed a feedback questionnaire and four spoke to the evaluator about their experience. Feedback from the questionnaire was very positive in relation to participants' enjoyment, learning, attitudes towards the museum and desire to work with the museum (either on projects or as a volunteer) in the future (see table 3).

<b>Table 3: summary responses to the LGBTIAQ+ strand evaluation questionnaire (n=7)</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
The project met or surpassed my initial hopes or expectations?	3	4			
Participation in the project has enabled me to gain new knowledge.	2	5			
Participation in the project has enabled me to gain new skills.	3	3	1		
Participation in the project has helped me to gain confidence	3	2	2		
Participation in the project has taught me about different issues in labelling and documenting objects.	5	2			
As a result of participating in the project, I now have a more positive view of the museum.	3	4			
I am interested in participating in similar projects in the future.	4	3			
Circumstances permitting, I should be interested in volunteering with the museum in the future.	2	4	1		

54. When asked about what they had enjoyed most about the project, respondents to the questionnaire reported enjoying meeting new people, learning about museum processes, and working with partners on a range of activities. Representative comments included:

*The weekly meetings - just discussing what people have chosen as their objects.*

*Demystifying museum cataloguing protocols...meeting participants...learning new ways to view and catalogue through story.*

*The outcome of the film editing.*

*The production side. I think the team was well put together - collectively, they did a good job of guiding us through the process of curation, especially through a queer eye. The curation side. I appreciated the storytelling that led to the end collection and it was particularly interesting to me to gain more of an insight into queer women's history.*

*It was well structured and I liked working with partners from other sectors, e.g. writers and filmmakers.*

*The sense of community it created.*

*I enjoyed the input from Eleanor and Kasey, the input from EJ and the transgender museum information, the workshop with Dinos, the filming with Alice and Kamila. I found the information and discussions on labelling objects fascinating.*

55. When asked about how the project and activities might have been improved, respondents to the questionnaire reported that they found *MS Teams* more difficult to work with than other online meeting software [albeit recognising the accessibility of the online meeting format] They also reported wanting more directed time to work on the films. Representative comments included:

*More time to plan and work on the films, for participants and filmmakers. So films don't have a formulaic limited format due to constraints for film and edit.*

*[If] there was a clearer direction in regard to the films.*

*[If] there was a clear point of contact for any concerns that felt approachable and confidential.*

*Apart from "We all hate Teams" becoming our unofficial motto, the project was handled very well. The online element was, I think, a good way to increase accessibility to the project from both sides of the production fence. Obviously, the show and tell elements would probably have translated better in person and were it any other year, that likely would have been how it would have been handled. I can certainly see a mixture of the two working well for future projects, however!*

*Just a bit more time and conversation at the beginning about ideas.*

*Not sure it could be even better apart from meeting in person etc.*

*I found Teams difficult to use... would have preferred the sessions to be on Zoom.*

56. Semi-structure telephone interviews (of around 20-30 minutes) with four out of the eight participants provided further evidence of the overall positive impact of the project, personally and in relation to LGBTIAQ+ history / stories. Representative comments included:

*I've always been interested in museums but found them disconnected from the real culture around them. Very traditional, draconian approach to objects as a relic rather than part of the live culture around them. They seem dead when they are very much alive and part of living history. I initially thought we were going to be given an object and place it in a queer context. Explore the relics from a queer point of view. Interesting misunderstanding when it was actually my object. That led me down a different way of thinking. They wanted something from our lives – it was fresh, simple and made more sense... more accessible and immediate. I could think of 20 objects!*

*At first I wasn't sure – I didn't think I had anything of interest. I was thinking of objects as a statute or pot or tiger skin. But then I thought of newsletters. Other things that appealed was that it was online rather than going to evening meetings. This was an advantage (since I have had breast cancer). I've always had a huge interest in history and museums. I began as a history teacher. I have a love of preserving social history. Love Hastings museum – its quirkiness. I've a great fondness for its exhibits. It was very useful to have two sources of information about the project – getting it from different sources – if you present it two or three times you get a better response. Personally – I have done a lot of work in the community and it felt like a way of celebrating the contribution I had made. I hadn't anticipated that. It was a lovely bonus.*

*I'm fascinated by queer history. I spent years at school not learning about people like me. It has been revelatory to hear stories that resonate. I want to be a part of a movement that spreads that to young people – it would have changed my world. In terms of the project, the most interesting thing is that they [the museum] are interested in doing this kind of work – giving the space, it is a beginning, wanting to work with us to find these stories.*

*I liked because it was Arts based. Also it was an opportunity to meet people in the queer community with similar interests. I've always been interested in museums and heritage and then became an artist. I hadn't been to the museum because of Covid (but now I very much want to). I hadn't expected it to provide such good training – on labels, the placement of objects, and from Dinos on how to think about stories. It was much more than I imagined it would be. An inside guide to the museum. It made me want to go and see it. It was nice for museum to connect with the queer community and make them visible.*

57. The interviewees also provided suggestions on what had worked well as well as how the project might have been made even better, demonstrating a range of ideas and opinions. Representative comments included:



*The Film makers should have been there from the start. It was too late. It wasn't integrated. Rather than E-J, it should have been the filmmakers to talk about colours, situation, set, how it speaks to the object. I felt it was rushed. Zoom was flexible. Lots of possibilities. I didn't have to travel which was great as compromised with health since had chemo.*

*Good timescale. Sessions were well-crafted. It was great to have input on the museum of Transology in Brighton. Fantastic framing of a queer project. Eleanor and Kasey's input on the museum was fascinating and I learnt a lot. I hadn't expected to be so fascinated with the process of labelling. I will never go to a museum again without paying attention to the labels. When writing our own labels found the input really helpful. It was difficult – what to leave out, what to put in. Filming – brilliant job. Really enjoyed it at the museum. Odd to be there with no-one. The filming was very supportive and brilliant. I enjoyed hearing and seeing other people in the group. As a smaller group that worked well – splitting off into pairs. And the workshop with Dinos to write the film was really useful. We would probably have been at a loss without that. It gave us structure.*

*The film idea was great but two minutes was a hard ask – I had to take out a lot of the history. I liked the process – the filmmakers. The speed. But we were expected to do a lot in a short period of time. I thought the best was the one filmed in the garden. The ones in the same place were less interesting. In an ideal world would have made them more individual. I had done scouting for locations, but then only found out at last minute it would be at the museum. It was a bit disappointing. I would have liked more directions – we could do this, could do that (i.e. bring in props).*

*The films were very professional. It was a good quality project. Always prefer meeting face to face but said at the last meeting – it was a safe space and there was a real sense of getting to know each other quickly. Sharing each other's stories made us feel more connected. It worked well online. Quite like it – it's happenstance – that they have finished the videos but there is a delay to launch (website delayed). Still got that to look forward to. Meeting as a group. Has to end at some point but gives us time to reflect and then they will be released / on show.*

58. Overall participants were keen to continue their involvement with the museum, either through participating in future projects or through possible volunteering activities. Their comments and suggestions included:

*Lesbians never get in the news – lesbians say they want a quiet life. It's a double edged sword. It means being invisible. When you are invisible you don't get the quality of life of the visible. I'd be interested in getting involved in things that make their story more visible. Talks or an exhibition.*

*It would be good to create more of an LGBTQ collection – great if that could be taken forward. It would be interesting to look at buildings in Hastings and who lived there. Women's history that hasn't been explored or represented. And do something in the museum. The museum did a youth project with teenagers – it would be good to do something like that, with linking / bridging different generations. Doing it together.*

*Maybe some kind of making or a collage. It raises the question 'how you get more people participating?' I know people who would have enjoyed the project but didn't get involved for various reasons. We need advocacy or champions. It would be nice if the films could be shown in the museum with tea and cakes and talk to people. Possibly as an opportunity to make links with schools or colleges.*

*Looking forward, well a museum like the V&A have got it right. They have done the queer narrative and queers tours. Got queer folk to do the tours. I've just finished a V&A course on queering the object. So, going out and sharing them in a more proactive way – I would like to be involved in that. Exhibition of queer stuff and queer figures – anything with the words 'queer' and 'history'. I also enjoy running quizzes. I'd be interested with helping with anything like that.*

*It's great that the museum hopes, has aspirations to work with us – it would interest me if they did something with queer identity / stories. I would like to be involved. And doing stuff with younger people. I want to help the museum with its projects.*

59. In addition to the LGBTIAQ+ participants, the evaluator also interviewed project partner and Artistic Director of Home Live Art, a Hastings based LGBTQ-led charity. The Artistic Director noted that the project, and work of its kind, have a valuable role to play developing audiences, making queer stories visible, building relationships with the museum, and bringing different members of the community together. Above all else, the project sends out a message that whilst other institutions have closed the museum's 'door is open and the space is there to use'.

60. Echoing the participants' feedback, they summarised the strengths of the project, and identified ways future projects might be developed.

61. The strengths of the project included:

- The warm, welcoming relationship with museum staff at all levels
- The time, effort and creativity of the LGBTIAQ+ participants
- The involvement of 'experts' to provide different / specialist voices
- The 'stunning objects' and their fascinating stories
- The display was in 'a prominent place in the museum'.

62. The suggested developments included:

- More cohesive, broader recruitment of LGBTIAQ+ participants
- Post-Covid, opportunities to meet in-person
- More time to explore issues and ideas in depth
- A clearer brief, and sufficient time if attempting ambitious creative projects
- Working on exhibitions together
- Exploring ways to use the museum space.

63. The LGBTIAQ+ strand lead and the Collections Access Officer reported feeling immense personal and professional satisfaction at the success of the sessions. Reflecting on the process, they noted that:

- The online group size was ideal for encouraging collaboration, whilst creating a safe and inclusive space.
- Working with an experienced facilitator and a partner from the LGBTIAQ+ community was important in supporting the project team and gave the sessions authenticity and authority. The partners were able to speak from personal experience and help place the sessions within a clearly communicated context.
- *MS TEAMS* as an outreach tool has limitations based on type of device and the features that work on each device. It created some problems with accessibility and caused issues around engagement (participants were generally more familiar with *Zoom*). Despite the technical issues, it was a positive experience online and they had also received positive feedback from participants about how they had ‘held the space’.

64. Moving forward the project team are keen to move the museum’s engagement with the LGBTIAQ+ community to a more developed and sustainable set of activities. In particular, they are keen to explore how LGBTIAQ+ volunteers can help to enrich the range of narratives visible in the museum, as well as potentially setting up an ‘advisory’ group to support museum staff in its planning and decision making processes. In this way, it is hoped to create a body of ‘critical friends’, with knowledge of the museum’s processes *and* the LGBTIAQ+ community.

65. Plans for a launch event and co-curated exhibition of the LGBTIAQ+ strand objects and films was disrupted by the Covid-19 lockdown and delayed by technical difficulties with the website platform intended to show the videos. In the meantime, links to the videos were added to the museum’s current website.

66. However, the films were shown on loop in the windows of an empty Debenhams store in the town centre throughout August 2021, to coincide with Pride month. In addition, the films were shared via Instagram between 23 August and 8 October 2021, receiving 769 views.

67. *We’re Here, We’re Queer*, the exhibition produced by the collective ran from 1 August



to 6 October 2021 and received around 3326 visitors. The display was made up of objects chosen by the LGBTIAQ+ strand participants.

68. Feedback comments on the films and exhibition, although small in number, were overwhelmingly positive, often expressing feelings of pride and validation, as well as a desire to see more, bigger and more ambitious projects celebrating the LGBTIAQ+ community. One respondent echoed the feelings of others, when commenting on one of the films:

*An amazingly powerful piece of work. As an oral historian (and a celebrant) people's life memories and hidden voices are so very important to me. What a truly valuable project.*

69. Another respondent commented:

*I was born in Hastings but moved to Greater Manchester as a child. I'm an LGBTQ advocate, openly gay activist, and founder of two pride festivals. My dad linked me to the new display in Hastings Museum and I just wanted to reach out to say how fantastic it sounds. I'm so happy to see Hastings putting itself on the LGBTQ map! I think for working class coastal towns there is a stereotype that they are very stuck in their ways and not moving forward - we know Hastings to be different. I'm really glad I'm seeing more and more progressive and inclusive arts and culture in Hastings and the days of being over shadowed are over.*

70. The display in the museum, and the films in Debenhams window, were advertised in the official Hastings Pride programme. In addition, the strand lead publicised the project and the exhibition in a Radio Sussex interview.





## Part D: The Refugee Strand

71. Slightly delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions, the project's Refugee strand sessions (linked to the British Museum's Spotlight Loan Crossings: community and refuge) started on 23 May 2021 and ran to 25 July 2021.<sup>14</sup> The sessions (delivered on-site) and subsequent exhibition of participants' artwork were planned with support from the Refugee Buddy Project.<sup>15</sup>

72. A weekly programme of art-based activities was led by a local artist (with lived experience as a refugee) and the Collections Access Officer. Sessions were organised across two separate five week phases. Initially, it was planned to work with families during phase one (23 May to 20 June) and young people during phase two (27 June to 25 July). However, phase two was limited to one session due to unforeseen difficulties engaging with the young people. When asked about what they were looking forward to from the sessions, they noted:

*Doing the art.*

*Learnings art, exposure to English, and improving their English.*

*Being able to see each other regularly, after so long (two families).*

73. The self-reported demographics for the adults was as follows:

- Seven participants were female and four were male.
- Of those self-reporting their age, this ranged from 20 to 39.
- Six participants self-identified as being Syrian, one as Moroccan, one as white Eastern European, and one as white other.
- One participant reported having a disability.
- Five participants self-identified as heterosexual. The remainder did not answer.

74. Although a relatively flexible approach to each week's activities was adopted (with no specific programme plan), the five sessions focused on:

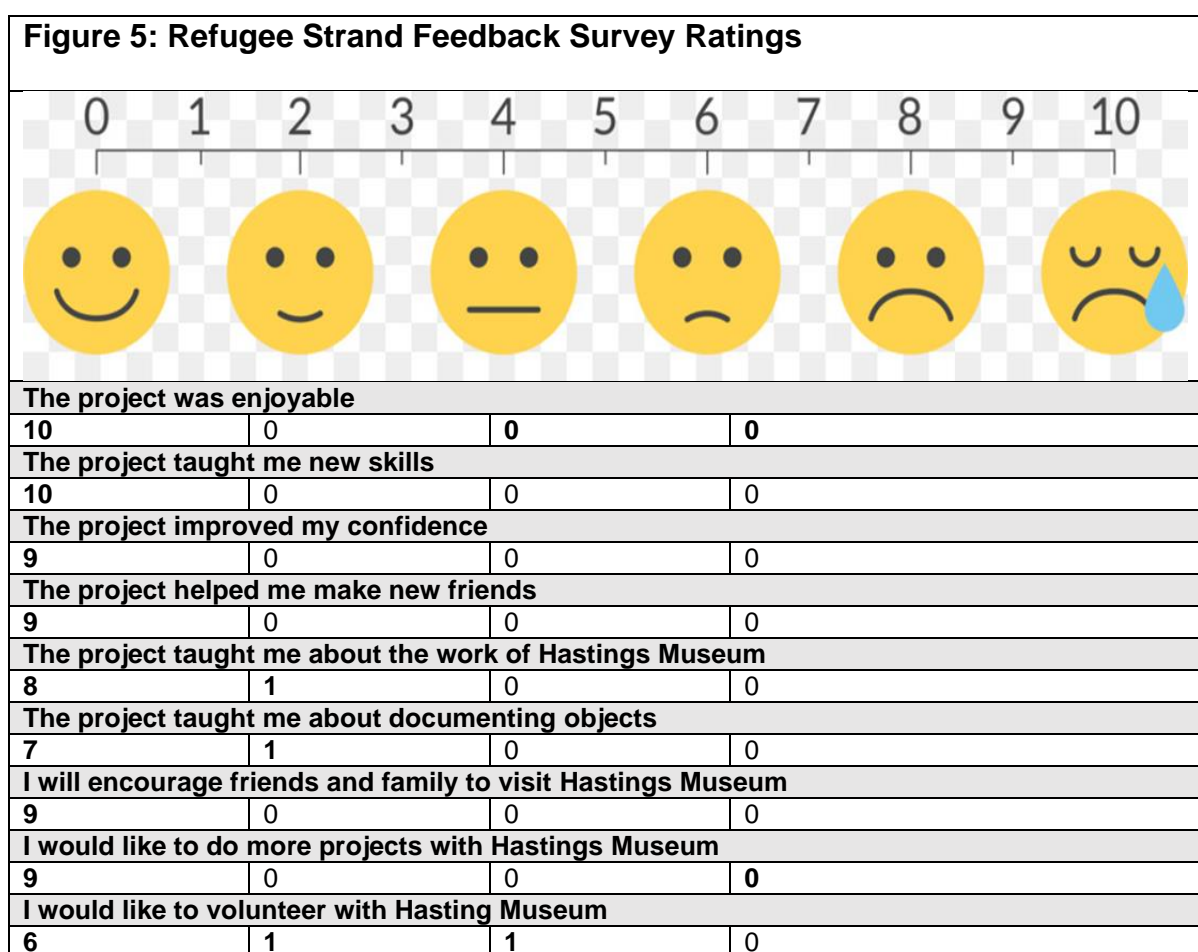
1. Introducing the museum and the 'What's in the Box' project, and introducing participants to painting with acrylic.
2. Teaching participants paint mixing techniques and how to use various tools (e.g. sponges, trowels) to achieve different effects.
3. Practising techniques, object handling, viewing watercolours from the museum's collection, and talking about recognisable places in Hastings.
4. Reviewing the exhibition themes, explaining label templates (telling the story behind the object) beginning work on final canvases, and touring the museum.
5. Finishing exhibition pieces, creating labels and completing a feedback questionnaire.

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<sup>14</sup> The touring exhibition 'Crossing: Community and refuge' began at Hastings Museum on 10 September and ran until 5 December 2021.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.therefugeebuddyproject.org/>

75. A feedback questionnaire was designed for participants to complete at the end of session five (20 June). Questions were written in clear English with visual icons included to aid understanding. However, given the varying levels of English language proficiency of the group, it was decided to (a) translate the questionnaire into Arabic and Kurdish, and (b) encourage respondents to answer free text questions in their first language.
76. Drawing on wider support from Hastings local authority, museum staff worked closely with the Syrian Resettlement Programme Coordinator to get the feedback questions translated.<sup>16</sup>
77. Eleven participants completed a feedback survey. Responses were typically positive against all key questions with most receiving the highest ratings (figure 5).



78. All those who answered the questions stated that the project was enjoyable and that they had learnt new skills. Most reported that participation had boosted their confidence, helped them make new friends and taught them about the museum's work. All those who responded said they would recommend the museum to family and friend and would like to do projects with the museum in the future. Written feedback, where available, indicated that participants had particularly enjoyed:

<sup>16</sup> The museum is not a separate entity to the local authority.

*The variety of colours we could explore and discover a bit of talent.*

*Helping me to express myself through colour.*

*Getting to know the museum, people and drawing.*

*The experience of drawing, colouring and exploring feelings.*

*Visiting the museum, drawing and colouring.*

79. When asked, participants could think of few things to improve the sessions, other than more sessions and 'a bigger room' with 'better lighting'. Those responding also consistently reported wanting 'more workshops', 'educational programmes' and 'painting lessons'.

80. Reflecting on the planning, preparation and activities undertaken in this strand, staff noted:

- Participants visibly enjoyed the art activities and seeing objects from the museum. It had been particularly pleasing to see how the children have participated alongside the adults, frequently helping with translation.
- The 'language barrier' was more challenging than anticipated. This made explaining activities. In the future, it would be helpful to have an additional community facilitator, partner representative or translator to work alongside museum staff.







81. The British Museum's Spotlight Loan Crossings: community and refuge exhibition ran from 10 September to 5 December 2021, coinciding with the British Museum Lampedusa Cross touring exhibition.<sup>17</sup> Community artwork created for the project remained on display until 31 December 2021.

82. An official opening was organised for 12 September to run in conjunction with the Sanctuary Festival 2021. The day-long festival focused on arts and culture and was organised in partnership with Hastings Community of Sanctuary. The annual event was inaugurated in 2017 to celebrate Hastings as a welcoming place for those seeking sanctuary and to bring people together in solidarity with refugees in our community.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/crossings-community-and-refuge>

83. The opening was attended by Issam Kourbaj (Syrian born, UK based artist, who created Dark Water, Burning World as part of the British Museum tour), Dr. Jill Cook (Curator of European Pre-History at the British Museum), Rossella Pagliuchi-Lor (UNHCR's Representative to the UK), and Rossana Leal (Founder and Director of the Refugee Buddy Project).



84. A video of the event, including information about the project, the workshops, the touring exhibition and the personal experiences of refugees living in Hastings can be found at [Crossings: community and refuge at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery - YouTube](#)

85. Overall, the exhibition was seen by 3,191 visitors. Feedback, gathered through a survey questionnaire and social media was very positive. Typical comments included:

*Heartbreakingly beautiful.*

*I saw the exhibition today and its one of the best I have seen at this wonderful museum. So many beautiful pieces. It made me reflect and I left feeling uplifted and hopeful.*

*Perfectly curated exhibition; beautiful and thought-provoking, especially the poignant display of butterflies.*

*Wonderful exhibition.*

*I was moved to tears looking at the What's in the Box artworks.*

*A lively, decorative exploration of people's thoughts and past troubles.*

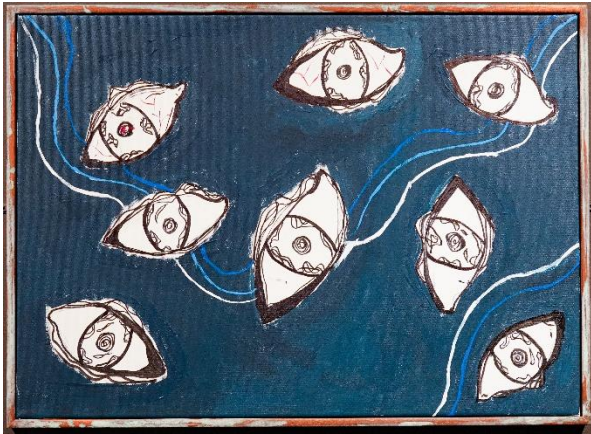
86. Visitors to the exhibition were also invited to leave messages of welcome to those seeking sanctuary by completing a luggage tag. Typical messages included:

- 'Hastings is a happy and inclusive community. I love living here and I hope you do too'
- 'Welcome! I hope you can find some peace'
- 'You are welcome – nobody left behind'
- 'Never lose hope! Know you are loved. You will be okay'
- 'Refuge for all who need it'
- 'We are one family and blessed when we love the stranger who becomes a friend'
- 'One world. Boundaries are manmade'
- 'Our home is your home'
- 'Your courage is incredible – we love you'
- 'Refugees welcome always'



87. The museum has also been asked by Hastings Community of Sanctuary to begin the process of becoming a 'Museum of Sanctuary', a designation that only four other UK museums hold.





## Part E: Final Reflections – Museum Staff

91. Whilst recognising that the challenges of Covid-19 and the subsequent national lockdowns had impacted on the project, staff felt that, overall, it had met its broad objectives

92. The key benefits of the project included:

- Improving the visibility of groups that have historically been underrepresented in the museum's collections and displays;
- Developing relationships with community organisations in Hastings and forming partnerships that will continue to grow across future projects;
- Developing new working relationships with local freelancers whose work is relevant to the museum, and arts organisations that the museum has not worked with before.
- Strengthening staff learning, support and collaboration (informed by evaluation)
- Improving museum documentation, the inventory of Social History, Natural Science and Art collections, and the transcription of registers;
- Developing institutional knowledge and public awareness of neglected / underused areas of the collections.
- Promoting an appreciation and understanding of how museum collections can help illustrate real world issues.

93. The key lessons learnt included:

- Where possible, allocating two staff per project strand would alleviate pressure points and enable more responsive and collaborative work;
- Planning for in situ language support should be central to any work with refugee (or second language) community groups.

94. Looking to the future, museum staff noted that they would:

- Continue to build partner and community group relationships, ideally translating those relationships into a more diverse museum audience and volunteer programme.
- Use the learning from the project to inform future work with community groups;
- Use insights into the collections in new interpretative schemes.

## Appendix A:

### **Press release: What's in the Box? Exploring Natural Science Collections.**

On Saturday 20 March, Hastings Museum & Art Gallery 'virtually' opens its doors to a new exhibition called *What's in the Box? Exploring Natural Science Collections*. This is the first of a series of three co-curated exhibitions as part of the *What's in the Box* Project

The project is a museum collections-based community engagement project with East Sussex home education, LGBTQ+ and refugee community groups. This project is funded through an Arts Council National Lottery Project grant.

In between the Lockdowns, home educating families have been helping the museum to document its natural science collections. Nine families have participated to date, comprising 10 adults and 12 children, ages 4 to 15. They have successfully documented 138 objects from the Natural History Collection.

The exhibition has been co-curated by the participants with Philip Hadland, Collections and Engagement Curator of Natural Sciences at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery and Kasey Ball Scott, Collections Access Officer. The exhibition includes favourite objects that were encountered during the documentation activity, alongside creative outputs from the students. These include poems, posters, and stop-motion animation.

The exhibition is delivered through an online exhibition tool called ArtSteps, alongside social media posts. A key component of the exhibition is a conservation message which is promoted through the work of the students. Many of the animal specimens encountered are representatives of rare and threatened species from across the globe.

The exhibition will open on Saturday 20 March.

You will be able to visit it via Hastings Museum website.

<http://www.hmaq.org.uk/>

For more information contact Philip Hadland at [philip.hadland@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:philip.hadland@hastings.gov.uk)

## Appendix B: posters from the home education strand exhibition.

Ellis the Echidna

Harry the Hornbill

Short-Beaked Echidna

Hi I am a Long beaked echidna. I live in New Guinea's tropical hill forests. I eats earthworms. I'm 60 cm Long. I'm an egg laying mammal called a Monotreme.

I'm endangered due to hunting and habitat loss for palm oil. You can help me by only buying sustainable palm oil.

By Toby Hopwood

**Save the Whales!**

1... THE WHALES CAN GET UP TO 40 MILLION

2... WE CAN DO IT! WE CAN SAVE WHALES BY STOPPING HUNTING WHALES!

3... WHALES ARE VERY VOCAL ANIMALS. PLEASE DON'T NOISE CAN BE HEARD FOR MILES UNDER WATER!

4... WHALES ARE MATED ANIMALS. EVEN WHEN THEY STAY TOGETHER FOR MONTHS IN THE WATER!

5... THE HUMPBACK WHALE CAN LIVE UP TO OVER 100 YEARS OLD!

Blue whale  
Humpback whale

DON'T MAKE THIS INTO THIS

STOP DEFORESTATION

*Small handwritten text: The koala population has fallen from 100 million to 100,000. This is due to deforestation and climate change. We can help by stopping deforestation and planting trees.*

save polar bears

**HARRY HORNBILL**

**SOUTHEAST ASIA**

Rhinoceros hornbills live in South East Asia in tropical rainforests. They are near threatened with decreasing population due to hunting and habitat loss. They only live in primary rainforests (These are forests that have not been cut down and regrown).

By Ollie Hopwood

## Appendix C: Queer History Collective sessions plan

<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Tuesday 9 February, 6-8pm. Online</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introductions</li> <li>- Context of the project - LGBTQI+ history, identity and museums, talk by E-J Scott followed by a discussion about the sorts of personal object you might want to choose for the project.</li> </ul>	
<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Tuesday 16 February, 6-8pm. Online</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, how museums work, and the stages an object goes through to become part of the collection, with Kasey and Eleanor</li> <li>- First chance to share your chosen object and why you've chosen it + help for the undecided, with E-J</li> </ul>	
<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Tuesday 23 February, 6-8pm. Online</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction to writing museum labels – what information do museums traditionally give visitors, and what's missing? With Kasey and Eleanor</li> <li>- Introduction to writing your script for individual films with Dinos from New Writing South</li> </ul>	
<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Tuesday 2 March, 6-8pm. Online</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time to share, revise, and test scripts, and preliminary thoughts about how to structure your film, with Dinos and Katy.</li> </ul>	
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>w/c Monday 8 March. TBC</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual slots for filming at the Museum <b>OR</b> if not possible</li> <li>- 1-2-1 discussions with filmmaker virtually to discuss how to film yourself on phone or laptop.</li> </ul>	
Editing period for film-maker to produce your films	
<b>Session 6</b>	<b>Tuesday 23 March, 6-8pm. Online</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Premiere showing of films</li> <li>- Discussion about next steps with Damian Etherington + project team</li> <li>- Reflection on the project with Chris Wood, our evaluator</li> </ul>	

## Appendix D: Queer History Collective Videos

[Barbara - YouTube](#)  
 [Fox - YouTube](#)  
 [Gen - YouTube](#)  
 [Glenys - YouTube](#)  
 [Harriet - YouTube](#)  
[Mother Demdike - YouTube](#)  
[Paris Grande - YouTube](#)  
[Zed - YouTube](#)