Depositing Archaeological Finds & Assemblages in Scottish Museums

2020 Survey Report

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Executive Summary

In recognition of the ongoing complex set of issues regularly encountered during the preparation and subsequent deposition of archaeological chance finds and assemblages to museums, a survey was undertaken to capture those issues across museums, universities, commercial archaeological companies, and national organisations involved with the historic environment in Scotland.

Funded by Historic Environment Scotland, the survey was led by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, National Museums Scotland, and the Museum Working Group of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy. In total 45 organisations, including 33 museums, responded to the survey which was undertaken in the summer of 2020.

Key results highlighted poor communication between depositors and museums, a sector need to raise awareness of standards that exist and provide training in these, and a need for a single, practical, definition of 'museum ready' for archaeological assemblages.

Furthermore, on average museums considered that 55% of all chance finds and archaeological assemblages deposited with them arrived in a state not deemed by them to be 'museum ready'. Accessioning and cataloguing backlogs exist across nearly all museum collections and include historic issues from archives deposited in the past.

A total of 17 recommendations have been made as a result of the survey with a view to improving the current deposition process in Scotland.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 This report presents the results of a survey undertaken as part of the 'Before the Museum' Project. This is a one-year project which has been developed by the Scottish Archaeology in Museums Working Group as part of Aim 3 'Caring & Protecting' of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy. The project addresses the first of three work strands identified by the Working Group as areas to focus on for the improvement of processes and partnership working (the work strands being 1- 'Before the Museum', 2- 'At the Museum' and 3- 'Access to knowledge/expertise/skills'). The project, which commenced in April 2020, is led by Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers Scotland (ALGAO Scotland) and National Museums Scotland (NMS), and funded by Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

1.2 The aim of the project is to provide a stronger bridge between archaeological fieldwork and museums. Through a series of workshops with museums, Treasure Trove, and local authority representatives, held during 2018 and 2019, the priorities and actions to achieve this aim were identified. The final outcomes seek to improve the creation of the artefacts element of archaeological archives and streamline their accessioning into museum collections.

1.3 The initial stage of the project required an understanding of the current practices and issues encountered, not only by those receiving archaeological chance finds and assemblages within museums, but also the issues experienced by archaeological contractors depositing material to museums. To achieve this a survey was undertaken between the 2nd June and 28th August 2020 across Scotland.

2 Methodology

2.1 The survey was designed to collate information about what happens to archaeological artefacts and assemblages before they are deposited in museums throughout Scotland, and immediately after they have been received by those museums. The questions were developed following

feedback from Scottish Archaeology in Museums Working Group meetings over the last two years, and the results of the 'Archaeology Collections in Scotland' Survey undertaken by National Museums Scotland in January 2020. The final question formats were agreed following reviews by the 'Before the Museum' project Working Group. Within the questionnaire the following definitions were applied:

Archive – The whole combination of finds assemblage, ecofacts (environmental remains and samples), human remains, documentary and digital records that pertain to an archaeological project.

Assemblage – The finds and ecofacts retained for long-term preservation. It may include copies of all or parts of the paper (including digital) record, the entirety of which normally passes to the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) maintained by Historic Environment Scotland.

Chance Finds – Those artefacts found other than by formal fieldwork projects, and including by metal-detecting. The term subsumes related terms such as stray and casual finds.

Registration – This term defines the museum documentation process, which has three key elements in line with the Spectrum standard:

1. **Entry** into the museum

2. **Accessioning** through the attribution of unique numbers (including part-numbers); for many assemblages this means the attribution of a unique number for the whole assemblage, with constituent elements subsequently sub-numbered.

3. **Cataloguing** into the museum's collections management system.

2.2   As the survey targeted two different groups of stakeholders, namely those who deposited archaeological material and those who received it, the decision was made to split the survey into two sections, with Part 1 designed for museums, and Part 2 for all other types of organisation. The results in this
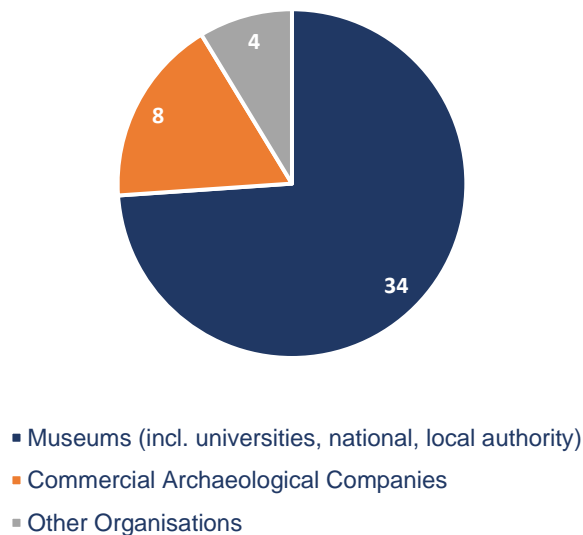
report have been split accordingly into two parts to maintain this distinction between the stakeholders and their different roles within the process.

2.3   The survey utilized the ©SurveyMonkey platform through the Aberdeenshire Council corporate account. It was issued on the 2nd June via targeted email contacts, Twitter, Museums and Galleries Scotland e-newsletter, and regional museum forums. Two follow-up calls by the project team for participants were made via email and social media while the survey was open, and the survey period itself was extended to the 28th August recognising that many of the intended stakeholders were furloughed or experiencing other priorities as their organisations reacted to Covid-19.

2.4   Upon closure of the survey all the results were collated in Excel with the removal of all duplicate or blank responses. Where conflicting or incomplete responses were encountered, clarification was sought from the original responding organisation.

3   Overview of Responses

3.1   The survey received 46 usable responses representing 45 different organisations. Those organisations can be broken down further into the following types:

Overview of Responses

- ▪ Museums (incl. universities, national, local authority)
- ▪ Commercial Archaeological Companies
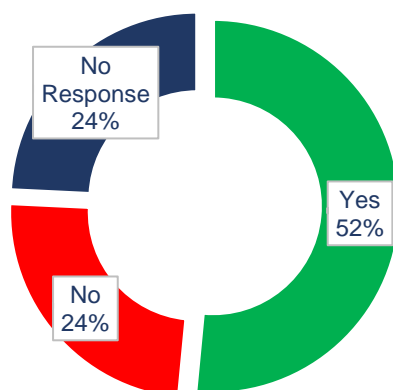- ▪ Other Organisations

- 34 accredited museums consisting of
  - o 12 Independent museums
  - o 17 Local Authority museum services (including two different museums that fall under the umbrella of one Local Authority)
  - o 1 National museum
  - o 2 University museums
  - o 2 Other national organisations with museums / collections
- 8 commercial archaeological companies (or 'units')
- 2 universities
- 2 Local Authority archaeology services

3.2 In addition to the usable responses detailed above, there were 18 blank responses, 11 duplicates by the same individuals (reflecting connectivity issues at the time of completion, or new attempts following interruptions before completion), and 15 multiple answers from the same organisation (these were checked and distilled down to one per organisation, with clarification from the relevant organisation where required if conflicting answers had been provided).

3.3 For all usable responses used in the survey analysis, information on their contact details, type of organisation, and willingness for such data to be held in accordance to GDPR was provided without exception.

3.4 Asked whether respondents would be willing to answer further questions by telephone and / or email to provide information for a case study for this project, the following was received:

Museums Follow-up Consent

No Response 24%

No 24%

Yes 52%

All Other Organisations Follow-up Consent

No Response 33%

No 17%

Yes 50%
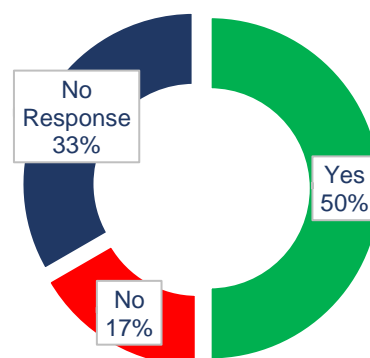
4 Survey Part 1 – Responses from Museums

4.1 Museum Response Summary

A total of 34 usable responses were received for the section of the survey designed specifically for museums (i.e. those who receive chance finds or archaeological assemblages). Two of the responses, while representing different museums, came from the same overarching organisation. Given that the answers matched exactly between the two responses, they were merged into one response, giving a maximum potential of 33 responses for any given question. Question 31 asked for information about the responding organisation and has been included in Section 3 above.
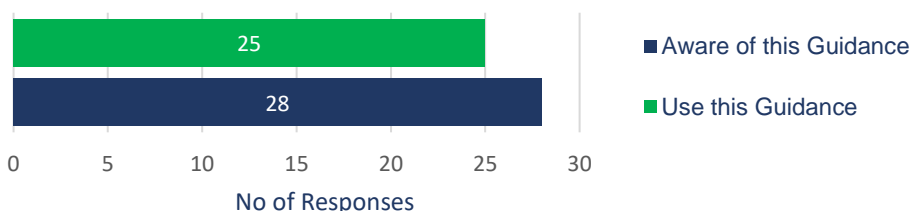
4.2 Treasure Trove Profile

Question 4 asked whether the responding museum has a standing profile with Treasure Trove:

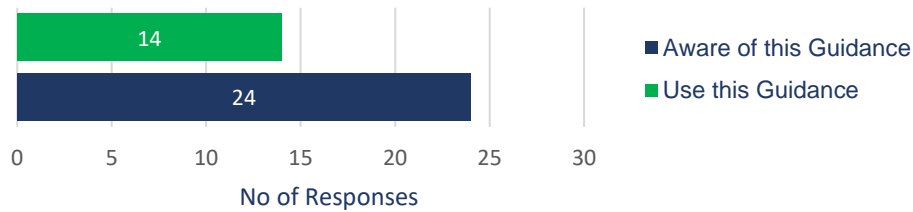|	Yes	No	No Response
Museum has Treasure Trove Profile?	21	7	5

4.3 Awareness of Guidelines for Archiving

The first set of questions, starting with Question 5, considered which resources or documents relating to archaeological archiving the museums were aware of, and which of these they currently use. Where a response indicated that a museum used a particular document, but had left the corresponding 'Are you aware of this document?' tick box blank, it has been assumed that the 'Aware' tick box should have been ticked as well, based on the fact that they are actively using the document. The results below reflect this adjustment.
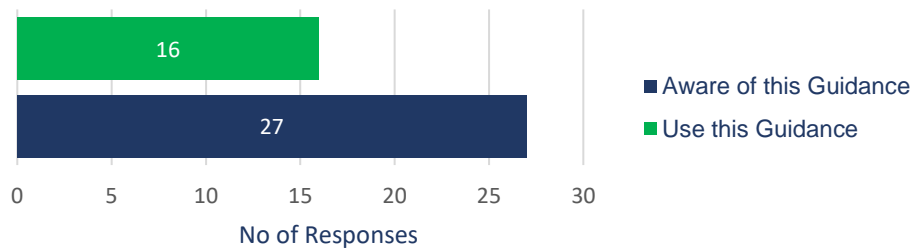
SPECTRUM UK Collection Management Standard for Museum Collections and Resources (Collections Trust)
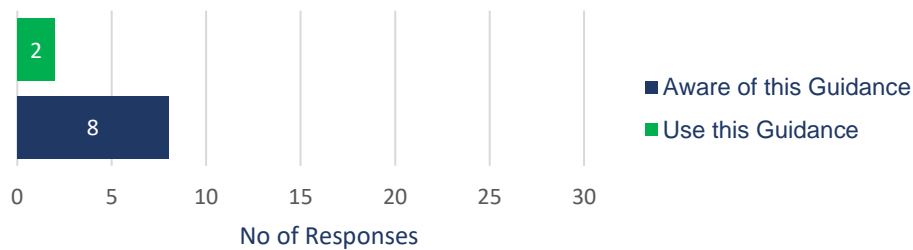

- Aware of this Guidance
- Use this Guidance

No of Responses

Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections (Collections Trust)

Use this Guidance	14
Aware of this Guidance	24

No of Responses

- ■ Aware of this Guidance
- ■ Use this Guidance

MGS Guidelines (for human remains)

Use this Guidance	16
Aware of this Guidance	27

No of Responses

- ■ Aware of this Guidance
- ■ Use this Guidance

ICON Guidelines and Standards

Use this Guidance	2
Aware of this Guidance	8

No of Responses

- ■ Aware of this Guidance
- ■ Use this Guidance
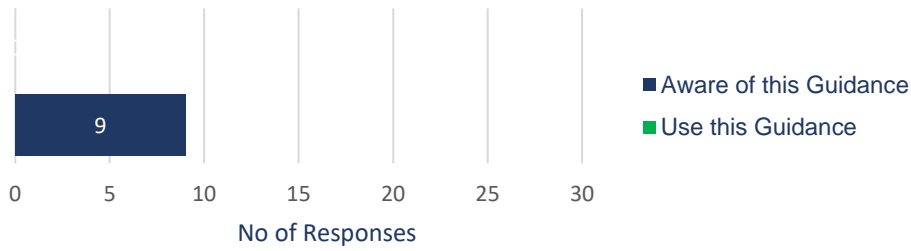
CIfA Standard and Guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives

Use this Guidance	3
Aware of this Guidance	17

No of Responses

- ■ Aware of this Guidance
- ■ Use this Guidance

Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) website

AAF publication 'Archaeological Archives - A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation'

HES Archaeological Objects Thesaurus (Scotland)

Archaeology Data Services (ADS) online 'Archaeological Resources in Cultural Heritage: a European Standard'

Information from finds specialists/ conservators
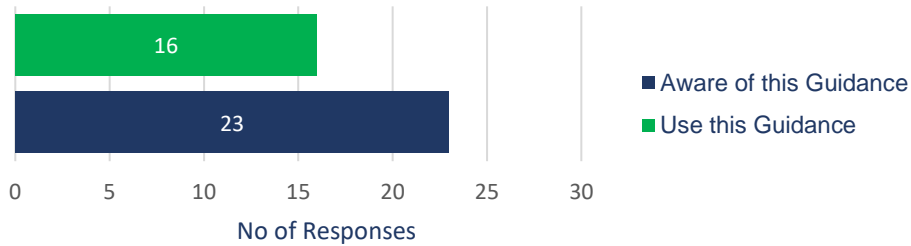
Other Terminology or Thesauri
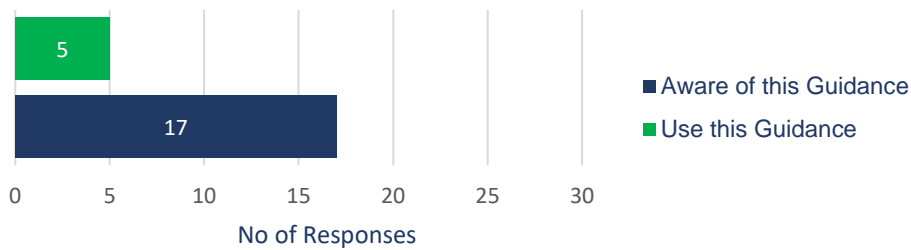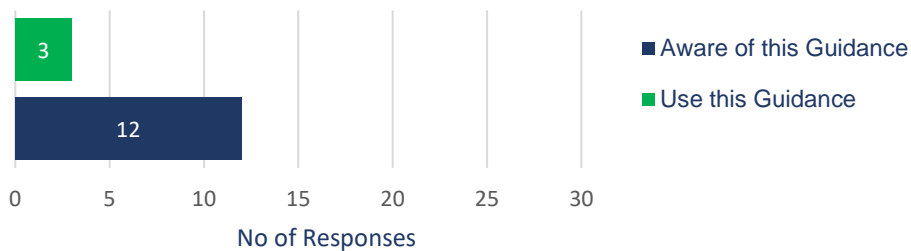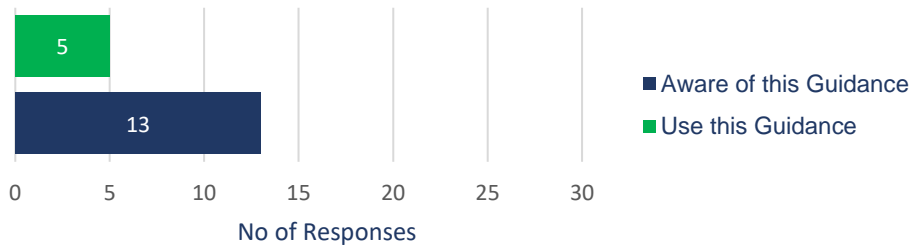

In addition to the resources listed in the question, museums were invited to submit the names of other resources which they use. Each of the below was named once by a museum:

1. NMS Human Remains in Collections Policy (https://www.nms.ac.uk/media/1158202/human-remains-in-collections-policy-2018.pdf) as this references DCMS 2005 'Guidance for the care of human remains'.
2. HES 2006 'Treatment of human remains in archaeology'.
3. Manual of Maritime Curatorship.
4. Glasgow Museums Policy Document.
5. Collections Trust Website (*this is presumably the wider website and not a reference to the specific Collections Trust documents named above*).
6. Treasure Trove Code of Practice.

When asked in follow-up Question 6 as to whether these resources / documents provide all the necessary information the museums need for accessioning an archaeological archive, the following responses were given:

Do Museums have all the necessary information required for accessioning an archaeological archive?

- No Response, 15%
- Don't Know, 15%
- Yes, 58%
- No, 12%
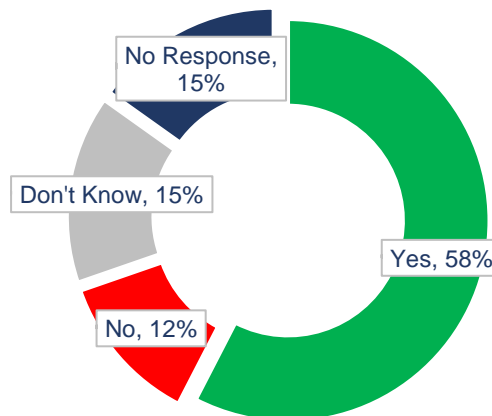
This would suggest that while there is good awareness and use of guidance produced by the Collections Trust, Museums & Galleries Scotland, and specialist reports submitted with specific objects or assemblages, there are still enough gaps in knowledge within the wider museum sector for accessioning archaeological archives to cause issues. Question 7 allowed respondents to provide further comment (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "AAF publication is the one I recommend to those carrying out fieldwork and CIFA."

ii. "We only have a small amount of archeological material in our archive and being volunteer run think that is enough. If we needed more information or advice we would contact *the local archaeological* Museum."

iii. "Use the documentation from SAFAP and excavation reports when available. Will consult a specialist if and when necessary, we do have access to some local archaeological expertise."

iv. "We very rarely accept archaeological archives and then, only if they have such a strong connection with *collection specific focus* that this would override any geographical significance which would see them better placed

in a local museum or a national museum with archaeology collections/expertise."

v.   "Yes, used in combination these provide a good framework for accessioning and managing the collection."

vi.   "We also use find spot/place name gazetteers/online resources, e.g. NMR, HERs."

vii. "Not familiar with all of these documents. It is difficult to know which terminology should be used in order to be compatible with other collections, current best practice and new research."

viii. "These resources have helped inform our own procedures for accepting archaeological material into our collection."

ix.   "We tend to catalogue finds using the finds list information or specialist reports sent by the archaeological unit. We also use simple terminology to describe the artefact/assemblage, unless stated otherwise in specialist sections of reports, so that specialists may add specialised terminology in the future."

x.   "We have no archaeological curatorial staff. Adequate information provided from TTU is not automatic; NMS and other specialists and conservators provide ad hoc advice on identification and conservation."

xi.   "No because we weren't aware of them all. Also how do we get all the information from assemblages onto ADLIB. Also, how to marry up what are in the field report/ monograph into the fields in our database."

Question 8 sought to clarify whether museums had their own in-house set of standards or guidelines that are used to govern the deposition of archives.

No Response, 15%

Don't Know, 3%

Yes, 39%

No, 43%
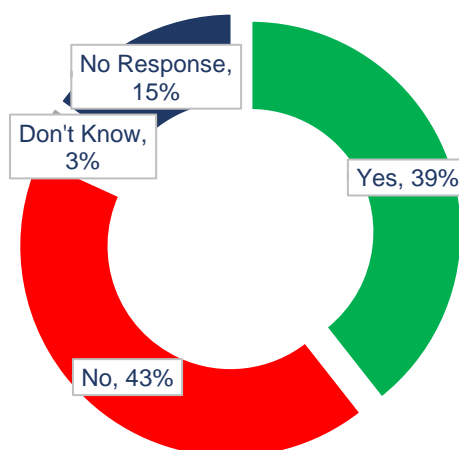
Does your Museum have its own in-house standards or guidelines for the deposition of archives?

Question 9 followed this up by asking, if yes to the above question, would you be willing to share a copy of these documents with the project team by email which produced the following result:

	Yes	No	No Response
Would you be happy to share your in-house documents with the project?	9	4	0

4.4 Training on Archaeological Archives

Question 10 asked whether the museum provides training for staff in the care, documentation, and management of archaeological archives.

Does your Museum provide training for staff in the care, documentation, and management of archaeological archives?

No Response, 15%
Yes, 27%
No, 58%
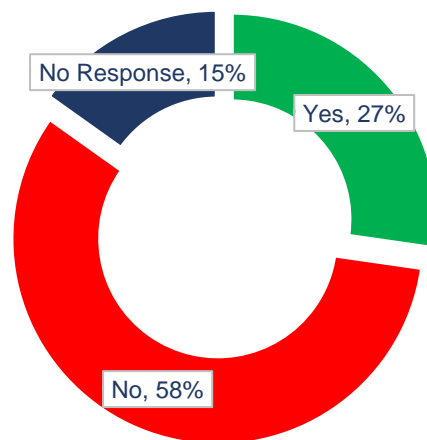
Question 11 allowed respondents to provide further details on either the training offered, or the reasoning behind why it is not provided (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "The museum provides wider-ranging in-house collections care courses, not specific to archaeology. The *organisation's* department undertakes skills development and training for its staff. NMS also provides a free training programme for museums in Scotland and have offered courses in

identification and care of archaeological collections, but this needs to be properly resourced to ensure real and regular support to the sector. This has extended to a trial CIfA-accredited 'introduction to finds' for unit archaeologists, and we would be keen to run similar courses if funding were available (they could be funded by charging attendees as CPD)."

ii. "Only one member of staff working with the archaeology collection (self)."

iii. "Normal Induction procedures to staff working with collections."

iv. "Volunteers attend training organised by *local* Museum when this is available and relevant to our collection and aims."

v. "The volume of archaeological material entering the museum is so small that specialist training is not warranted. Collections staff are trained in the use of the Documentation Manual as well as undertaking training courses from NMS."

vi. "in-house training."

vii. "Through our volunteer program."

viii. "Q8-10 - Not specifically - other than our Collections Development Policy, procedures and guidance that cover all collection types applicable to us."

ix. "No specific training in archaeological archives but in-house training on our wider collections management processes."

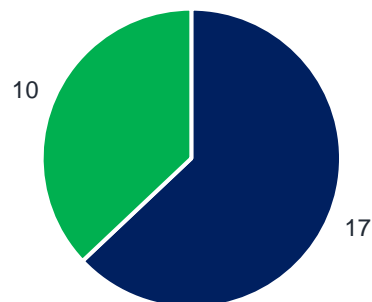x. "in-house training as necessary for volunteers etc."

4.5 Availability of Collection Policies

Question 12 asked whether the museum shared its collection policy for archaeology (either as a stand-alone collecting policy or part of a wider collection policy), and how this was done.

Collecting Policy for Chance Finds
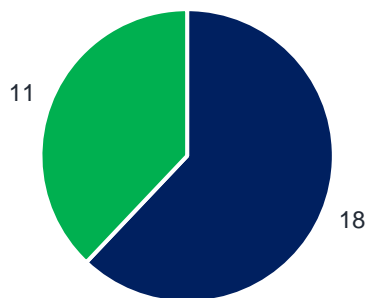
Collecting Policy for Assemblages

11   18

10   17

■ Available on Request   ■ Available Online   ■ Available on Request   ■ Available Online

Further detail was supplied by two museums, noting in one instance that their 'Collections Development Policy' was available online, and in the other instance a link to the online collecting policy:

https://www.nms.ac.uk/media/1162008/collections-development-strategy_v2_2020.pdf

4.6 **Origin and Volume of Deposited Archives**

The next set of Questions, starting with Question 13, sought to understand the volume of deposited archaeological chance finds and assemblages in museums, and how museums interacted with the depositors.

Average No of Chance Finds Deposited in Museums each year

No of Deposited Finds	No of Responses
Over 20	3
10 to 20	3
5 to 10	3
0 to 5	13
None	4
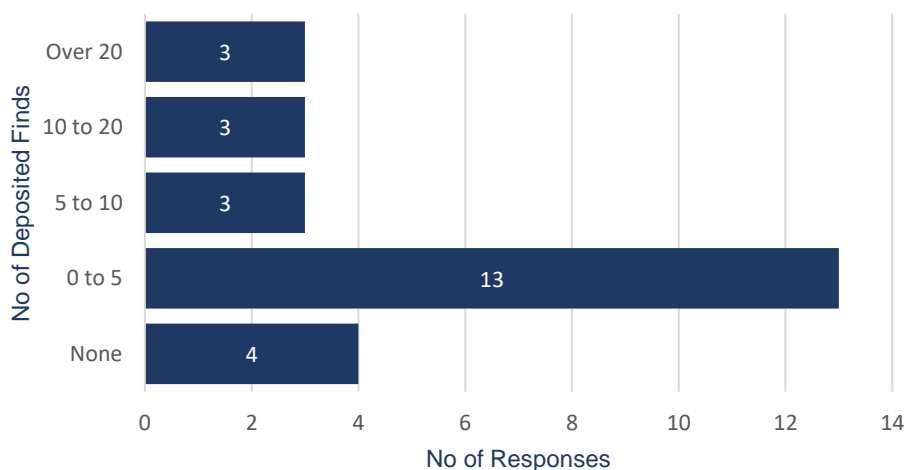
Average No of Assemblages Deposited in Museums each year
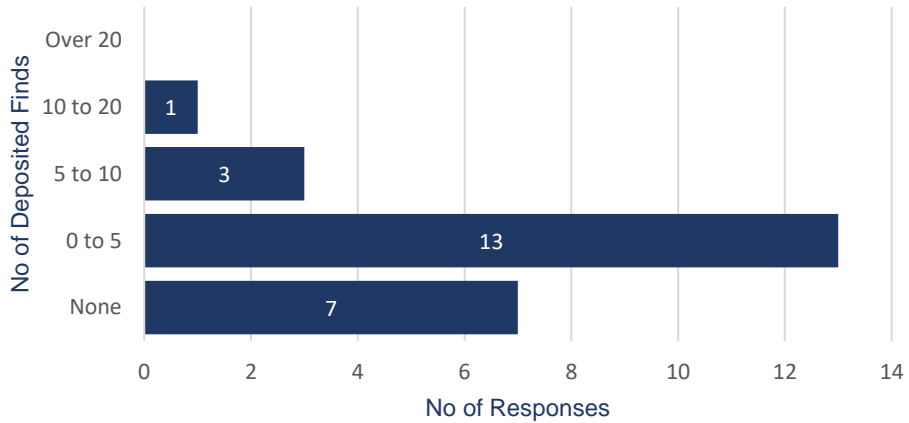
Question 14 sought further detail about the origin of these deposited chance finds and assemblages, i.e. how many are allocated from Treasure Trove per year?

% of Chance Finds Deposited in Museums allocated from Treasure Trove
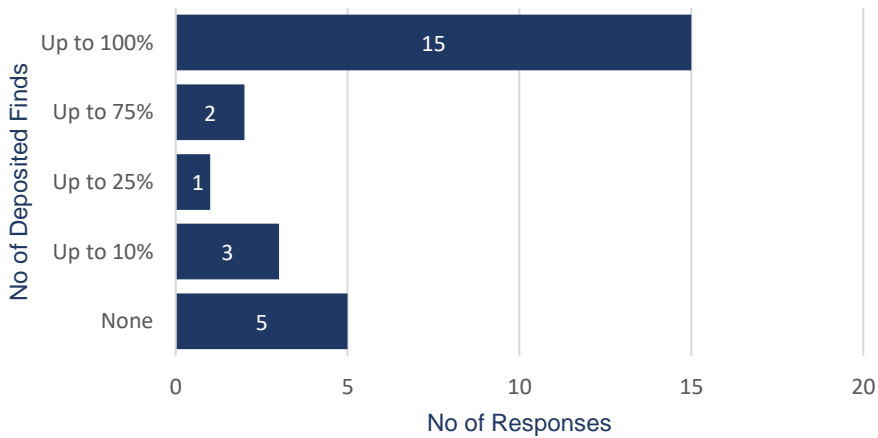
% of Assemblages Deposited in Museums allocated from Treasure Trove
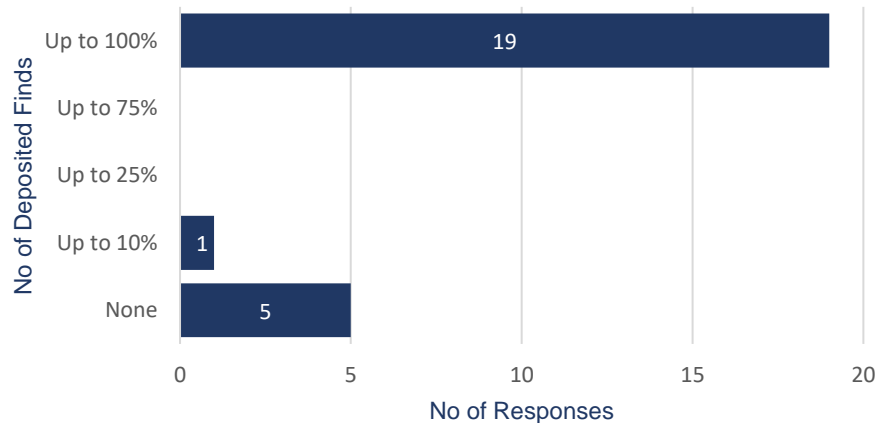
4.7 **Experiences of the Depositing Process**

Question 15 asked whether the museum usually undertakes a period of liaison with the organisation / individual responsible for depositing the archaeological find or assemblage archive prior to deposition. This liaison would normally be an opportunity to share information about the museum's collection policy, retention / discard policy, and its documentation, storage, and archive requirements.

For Chance Finds does the museum have a liaison period with the depositor
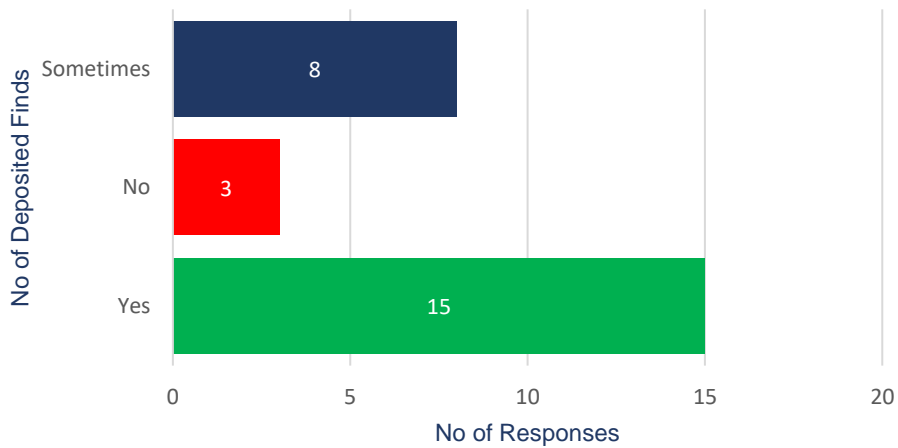
For Assemblages does the museum have a liaison period with the depositor
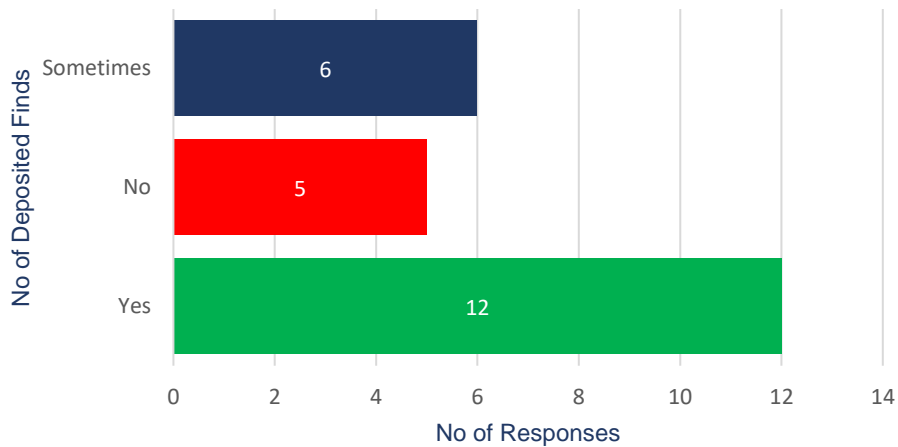
Following on from Question 15, Question 16 allowed respondents to provide further details around their experiences working, or trying to work, with individuals and organisations who are depositing archaeological material (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "With chance finds, the liaison is represented by the bidding process itself, which demonstrates that we are an appropriate organisation to take the find and that we are confident it fits our collecting policy etc. With assemblages, we bid on the basis of the information supplied to the TTU by the excavation unit. This typically provides a summary of the assemblage and a data structure report or published report. Our motivation to bid is normally on the basis of the assemblage's potential rather than its potential problems. Is it from a site where we hold collections already, and would thus bid for on the basis of maintaining the integrity of the assemblage? Does it fit into our collecting policy? Does it contain material of national importance, in which we have an interest? Scale of assemblage and any major conservation issues would both lead us to wider discussions before bidding, but these would be internal, in seeking opinions, rather than necessarily external. We tend to assume that the assemblage is as described, and the timescales in the TT allocation process rarely allow for detailed inspection of the assemblage (which remains with the unit) or detailed discussions with them."

ii. "Sometimes chance finds are reported to TT directly by an individual or through another organisation and we will only be notified by TT. Most organisations or individuals will contact the museum for information regarding deposition of assemblages. This is something I have been working towards since I was appointed to the post in *year.*"

iii. "The quantities vary, this is not prescriptive."

iv. "We follow the Spectrum guidelines used in our accreditation."

v. "There would be a discussion covering suitability for the collection, necessity for documentation, whether any object was subject to and had

been to Treasure Trove, whether the item was to be a gift or loan to the museum."

vi. "Depending on the nature of the find, its condition, location, relevance etc., or to liaise with the Receiver of Wreck (most chance finds offered are maritime)."

vii. "Would discuss with museum mentor."

viii. "In recent years have only acquired finds via Treasure Trove."

ix. "As per agreed WSI's all units are required to label boxes and finds with *name of museum* box and accession numbers prior to deposit in in store."

x. "Our main communication is with TTU. If a chance find is handed into the museum prior to TTU then we are able to liaise with the finder and learn more about the circumstances of the find. If they choose to deal direct with TTU then this information is often lost to our record. More often than not, excavation assemblages appear for SAFAP without our prior knowledge of it. The main communication is regarding how to organise delivery once awarded to us."

xi. "It simply does not happen and as it is not required has proven very difficult to get accepted."

xii. "We have had correspondence with depositing universities and organisations but the problem we have in *place name* not being able to see what is about to be delivered until it arrives. By the time the pallets arrive it is not an option to refuse to accept them if there is a problem - often the problems are not seen until the pallets are eventually unloaded."

xiii. "We are currently working on guidelines for deposition and would like to develop a better relationship with depositing units."

xiv. "Again, it is fairly recently I've got my head round all this and am seeing implications."

xv. "Entirely depends if the excavator gets in touch with us. Sometimes there is decades between excavation and depositing so sometimes we wouldn't' even know who to contact if we wanted to."

4.8 Condition of Deposited Archives

Questions 17 to 20 focused on the condition of chance finds and assemblages when they arrive at the museum. Question 17 asked what proportion of chance finds and assemblages that arrived at the museum in a state that the staff would consider museum ready. In this instance no definition of what was deemed to be 'museum ready' was given within the survey owing to the understanding that different interpretations of this existed across the sector.

% of Chance Finds Deposited in Museums in a state considered 'museum ready' by the museum
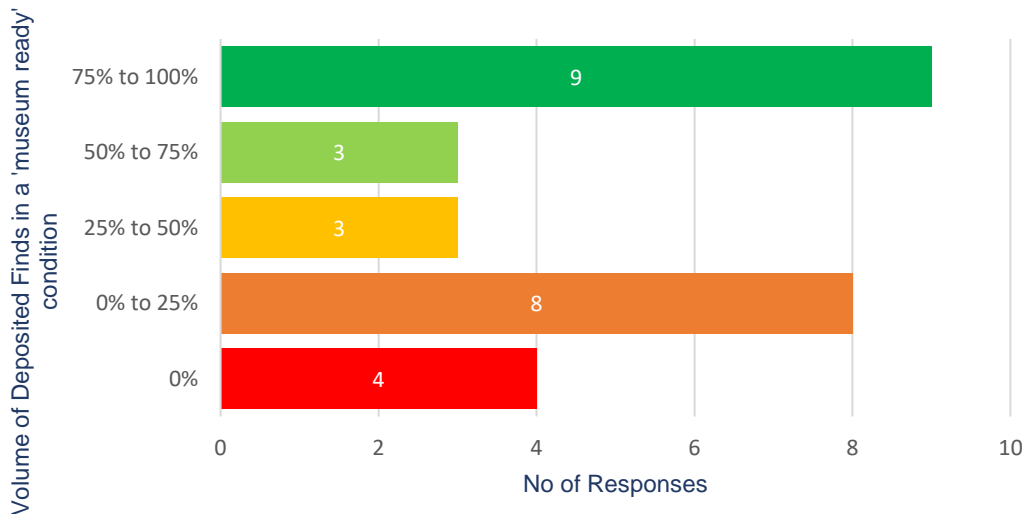
% of Assemblages Deposited in Museums in a state considered 'museum ready' by the museum
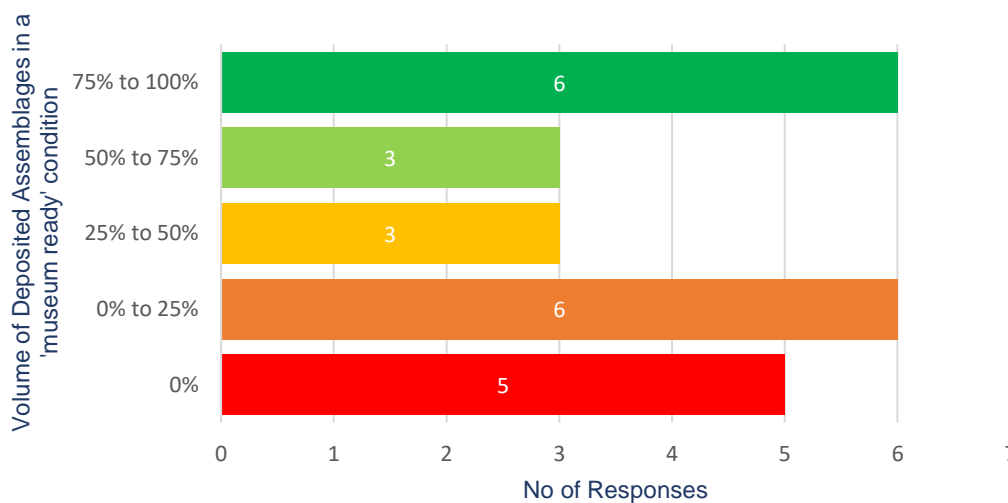
Questions 18 and 19 sought more detail around the type of issues encountered by museums from deposited archaeological archives. For chance finds / assemblages that were not deemed to be 'museum ready' (as indicated in their response to Question 17), Museums were therefore asked which of the following issues applied. Respondents were also asked to provide a number to represent the percentage of the received archaeological archives to which those issues applied.

% of Chance Finds with Unsuitable Boxes
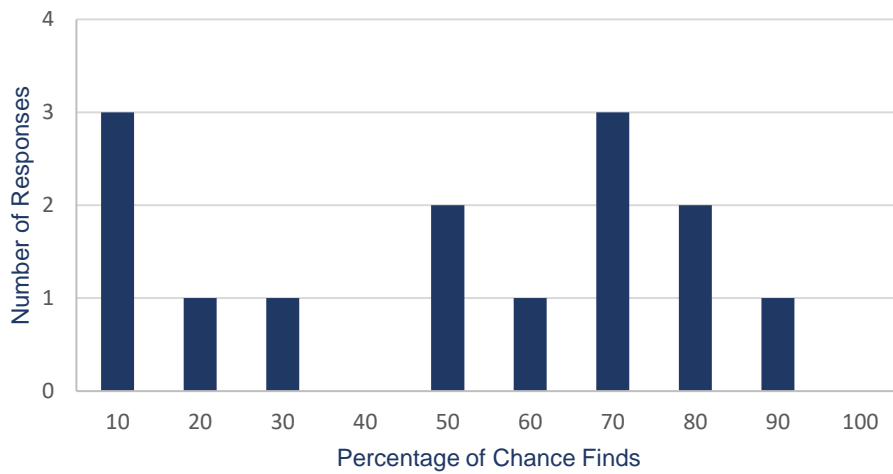
On average 51% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums in unsuitable boxes.

% of Assemblages with Unsuitable Boxes
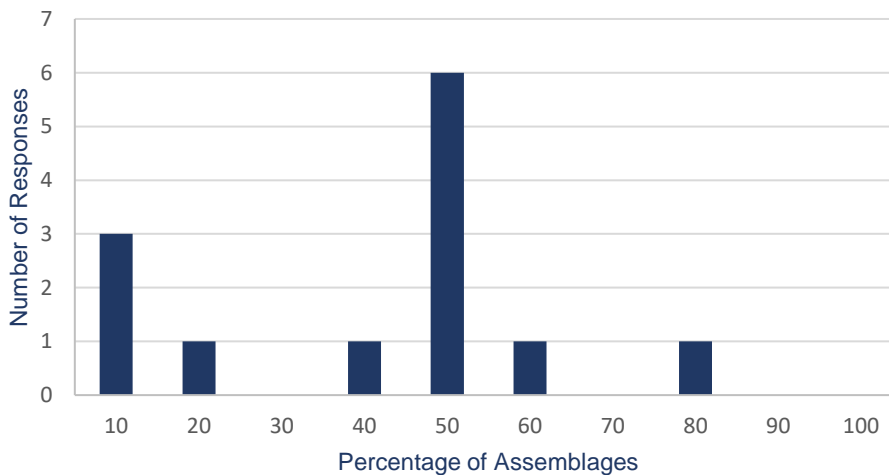
On average 42% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums in unsuitable boxes.

% of Chance Finds with Unsuitable Packaging
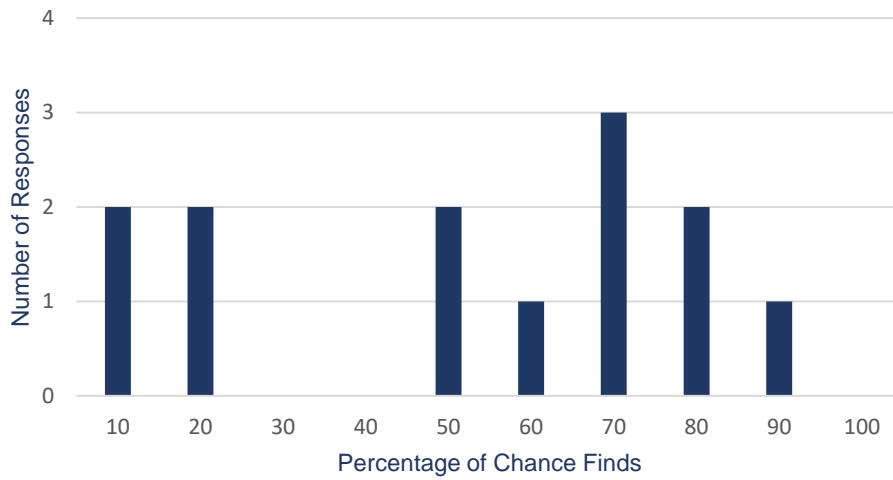
On average 54% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums with unsuitable packaging.

% of Assemblages with Unsuitable Packaging
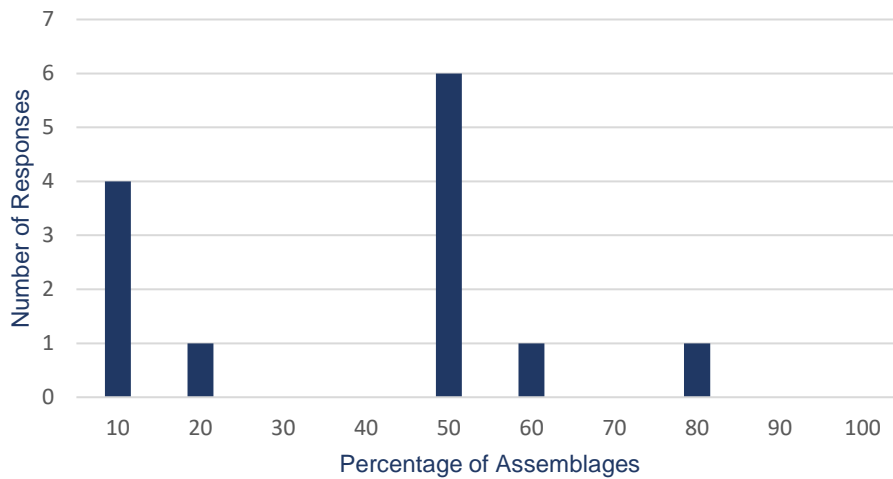
On average 39% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums with unsuitable packaging.

% of Chance Finds in an Unstable Condition
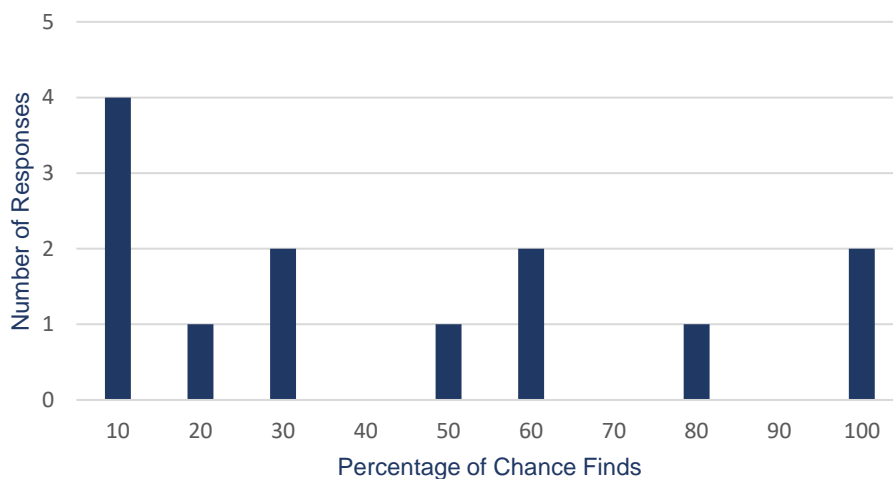
On average 42% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums in an unstable condition.

% of Assemblages with Objects in an Unstable Condition
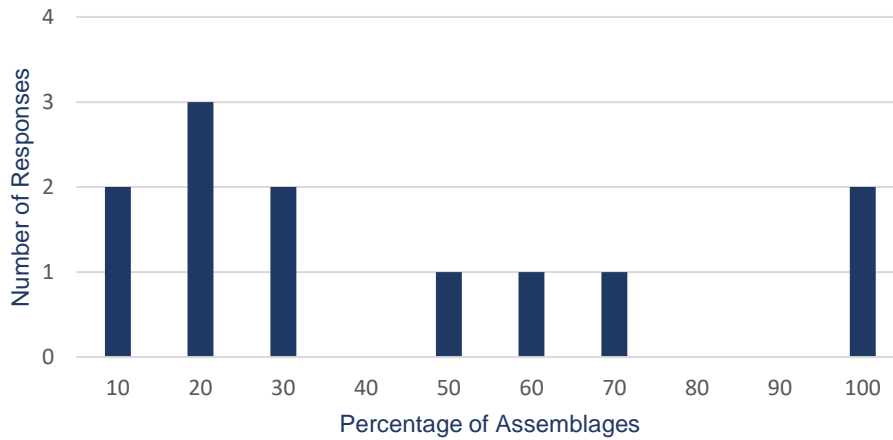
On average 45% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums in an unstable condition.

% of Chance Finds Not Cleaned
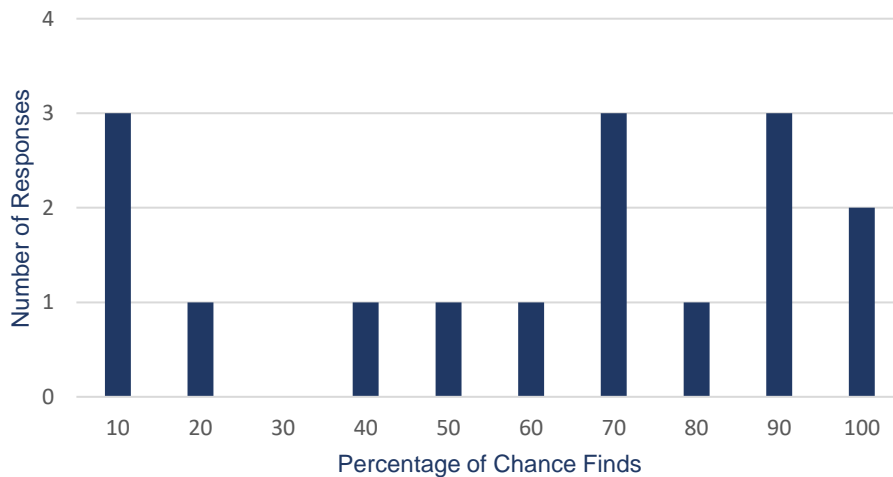
On average 56% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums not cleaned.

% of Assemblages with Objects Not Cleaned
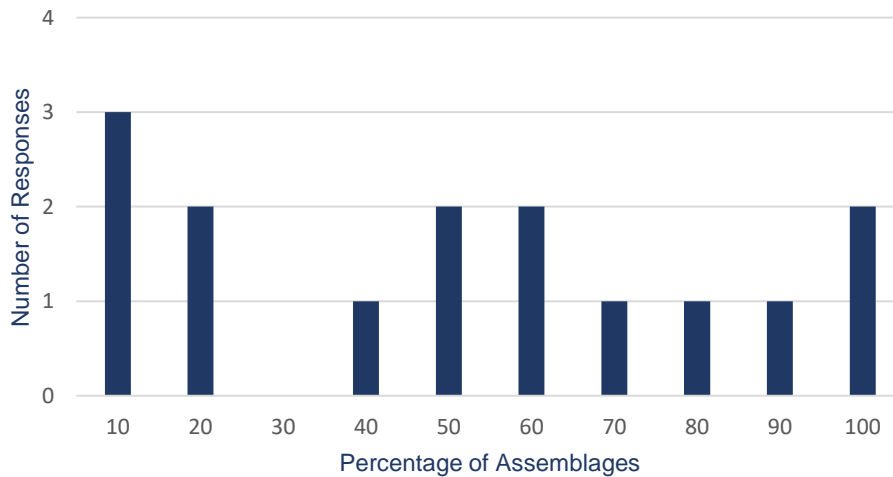
On average 52% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums not cleaned.

% of Chance Finds Not Labelled
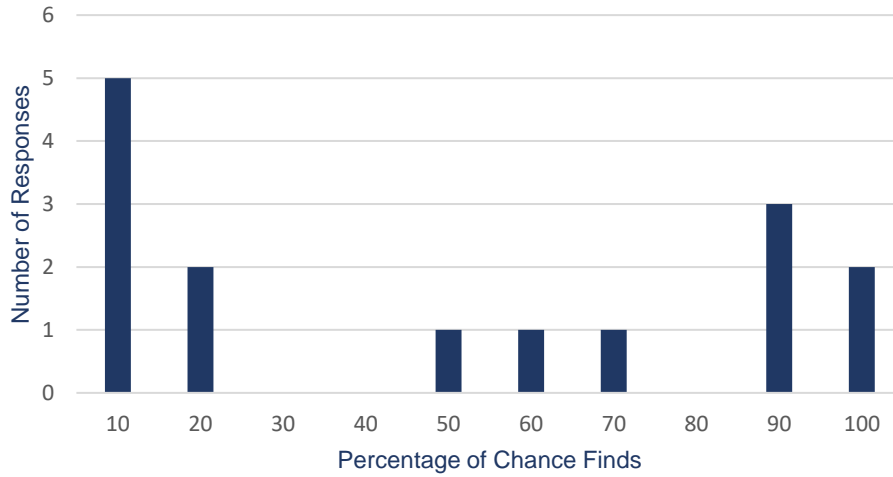
On average 50% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums not labelled.

% of Assemblages Not Labelled
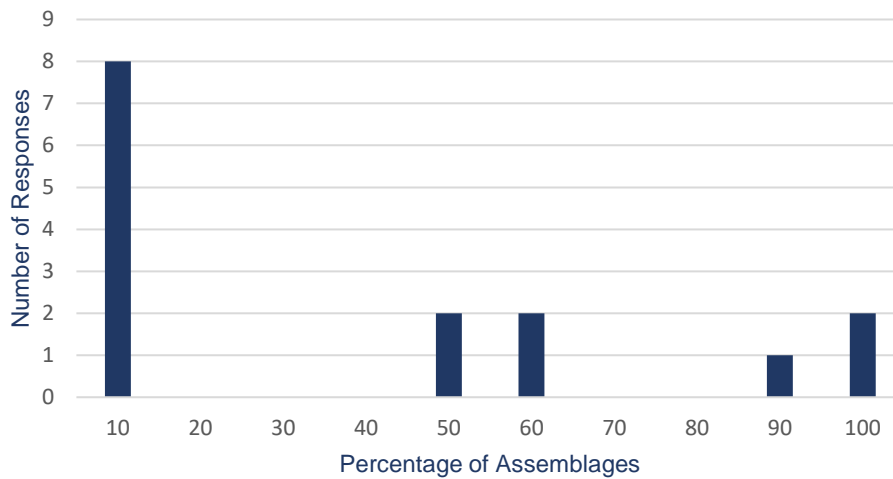
On average 38% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums not labelled.

% of Chance Finds with Lack of Documentation
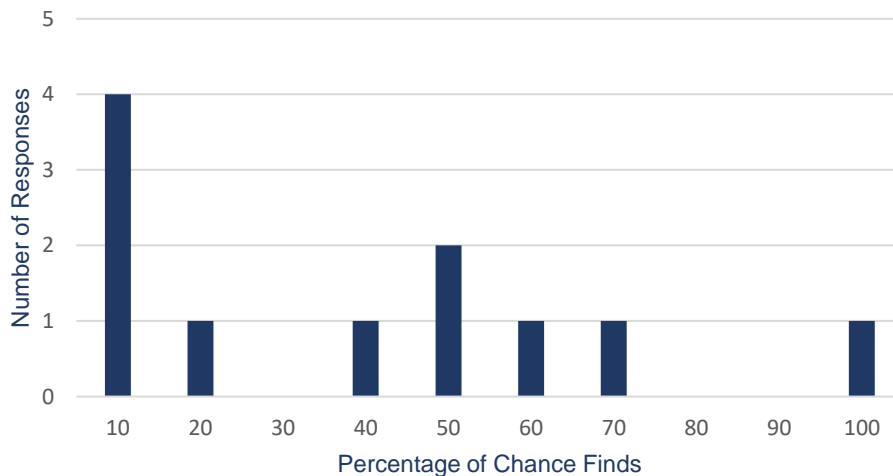
On average 40% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums with a lack of documentation.

% of Assemblages with Lack of Documentation
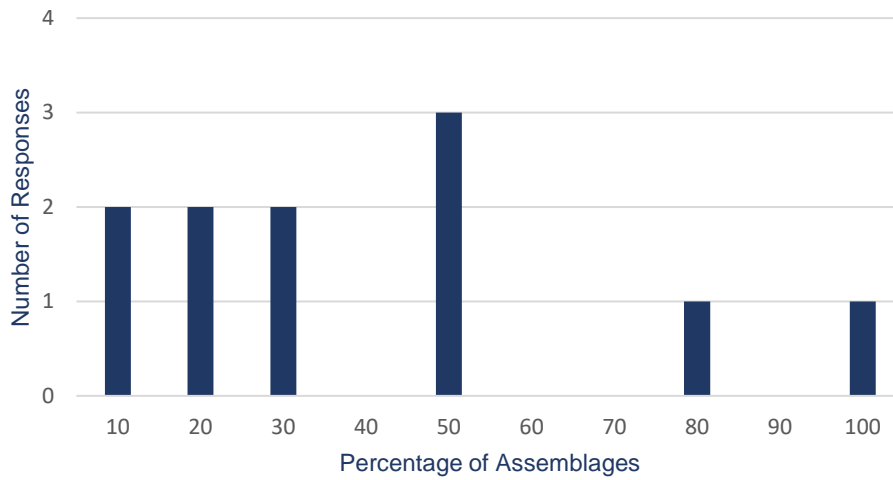
On average 41% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums with a lack of documentation.

% of Chance Finds with Documentation in an Inaccessible Format
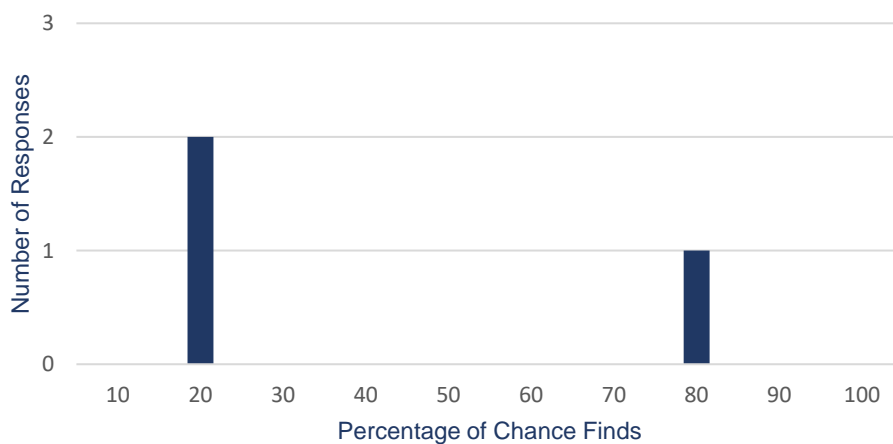
On average 40% of chance finds not 'museum ready' arrive at museums with documentation in an inaccessible format.

% of Assemblages with Documentation in an Inaccessible Format
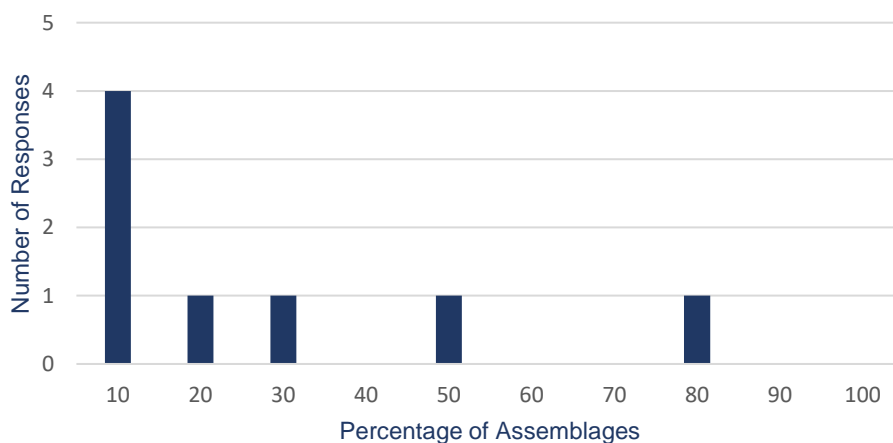
On average 28% of assemblages not 'museum ready' arrive at museums with documentation in an inaccessible format.

Question 20 allowed respondents to provide further details around their experiences with the state of archaeological archives that have been deposited with them (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "Unstable objects are mostly a problem with metalwork, particularly iron, where an assemblage or chance finds have not been conserved. Some units repackage material before delivery, but this is not always the case; sometimes field packaging is received in a poor condition. This is also the case where we acquire assemblages from research digs (e.g. universities) or historical excavations. A regular problem is an incomplete assemblage, with material sent to specialists but not returned; this often occurs with illustrated material. Documentation received is very variable, and often it is difficult to link finds to report. Sometimes we are able to go back to the excavators to get more information, but often we find the relevant staff are no longer there, and / or the archive has been sent to NMRS with no copy kept by the unit. Getting such data from NMRS has not so far proved easy. Documentation in an inaccessible format is mostly a problem with historical excavations where there is no digital archive, but it can also be an issue where information is in a database format which is not supported more widely."

ii. "It is the backlog assemblages that have the high proportion of unsuitably packaged archives, objects that haven't been cleaned or labelled and often without documentation."

iii. "Typically, chance finds in our collecting area appear once a year or every other year. Assemblages collected recently have contained mostly trace samples, soils, charcoals which cannot be cleaned or labelled but do come in labelled bags."

iv. "Often the excavators do not have correct or any ID for some of the items. Excessive quantities of soil and rock samples etc are sometimes included."

v. "No archaeological items offered."

vi. "We have not accepted archaeological material in many years and very rarely offered, so our processes for archaeological material are integrated into standard collections processes rather than being separate."

vii. "For chance finds, all objects should be cleaned and stabilised by a conservator. For assemblages, the main issues are inconsistent labelling and sloppiness around labelling and clear handwriting. Also, a lot of errors in the concordance between the contexts and the finds/small find numbers, and box packing lists, and bag labels."

viii. "Chance finds are usually received in the packaging that they were sent to TTU in. It can be a concern if they need conservation attention and this can be delayed by the TT process. Excavation assemblages require re-packing whereby standard boxes have not been used. Numbering of boxes and packages, whilst existing, may not be clear or legible."

ix. "The problem we have found with the last big assemblage we accepted was the fact that around 80% of the box packing lists have been inaccurate."

x. "At *name of museum* the bulk of our assemblages were excavated by *a local archaeological unit*. We have had few assemblages deposited with us in recent years, so the bulk of the information given above is based on current curatorial experience of the historic collections. Some of these collections have been accessioned but have not yet been through the Treasure Trove process, which we have been in discussion with TT and HES about. Many of the boxes were not conservation standard. There are some unprocessed soil samples in the archives. Some of the digital files relating to the assemblages are in a format that is not currently supported by software in *our organisation* and there is now a cost implication to getting appropriate software to view these files. Many of the databases are in Access which Microsoft will no longer be supporting."

xi. "Private companies are better than Universities at providing museum ready finds and also having a reasonable time frame between excavation and depositing as decades of lag create their own problems."

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4.9 **Average Times for Processing Archives**

Questions 21 to 24 examined the end of the depositing > receiving > cataloguing process for chance finds and assemblages, with a view to understanding the scale of potential backlogs. Question 21 initially asked museums how long before new chance finds, and assemblages, were accessioned into their collections on deposition. In this instance the survey considered accessioning to be giving an object a permanent accession number, written in the museum's accession register and the object securely labelled.

Average time taken before Chance Finds are accessioned by museums

Average Time Taken	No of Responses
Over 10 years	
Over 5 years	
Between 1 and 5…	4
6 to 12 months	4
3 to 6 months	4
1 to 3 months	7
0 to 1 month	7
Immediately	
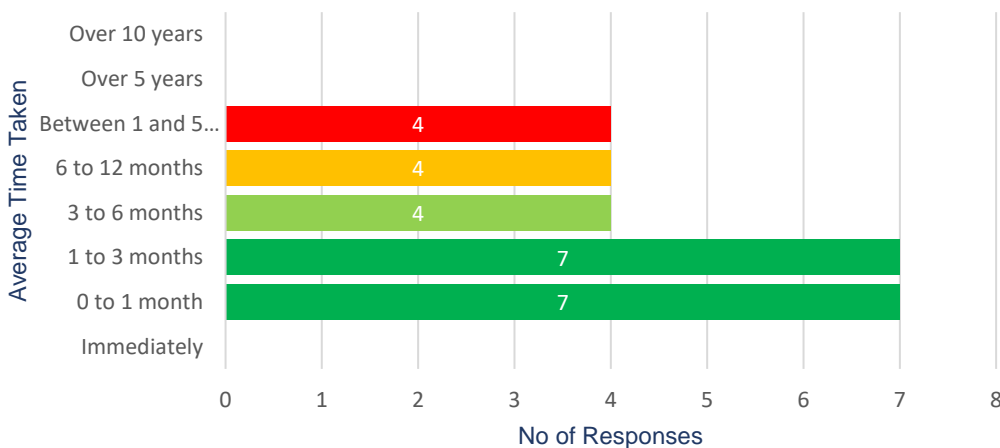
Average time taken before Assemblages are accessioned by museums

Average Time Taken	No of Responses
Over 10 years	1
Over 5 years	2
Between 1 and 5…	6
6 to 12 months	1
3 to 6 months	3
1 to 3 months	6
0 to 1 month	4
Immediately	

29
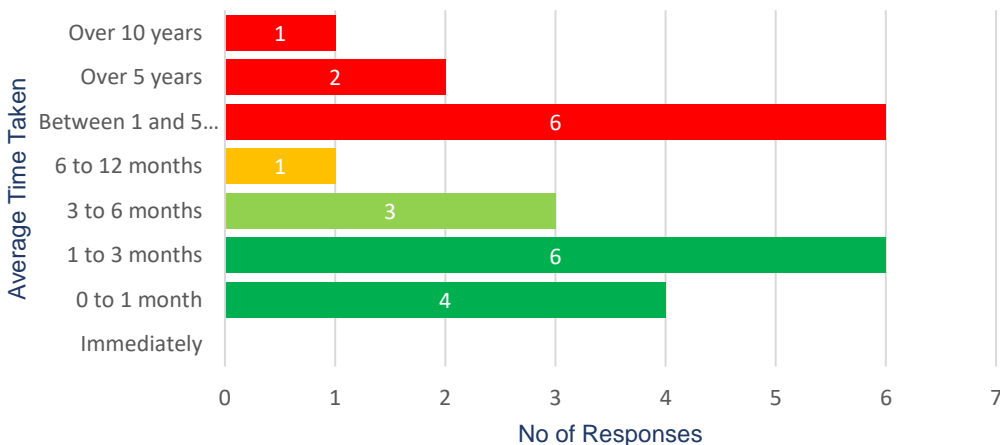
Question 22 asked museums how long before new chance finds and assemblages are catalogued into their collections (e.g. object is entered into the museum's collections management system):

Average time taken before Chance Finds are catalogued by museums

Average Time Taken	No of Responses
Over 10 years	
Over 5 years	
Between 1 and 5...	5
6 to 12 months	5
3 to 6 months	7
1 to 3 months	6
0 to 1 month	3
Immediately	

Average time taken before Assemblages are catalogued by museums

Average Time Taken	No of Responses
Over 10 years	1
Over 5 years	5
Between 1 and 5...	8
6 to 12 months	1
3 to 6 months	4
1 to 3 months	3
0 to 1 month	1
Immediately	

30
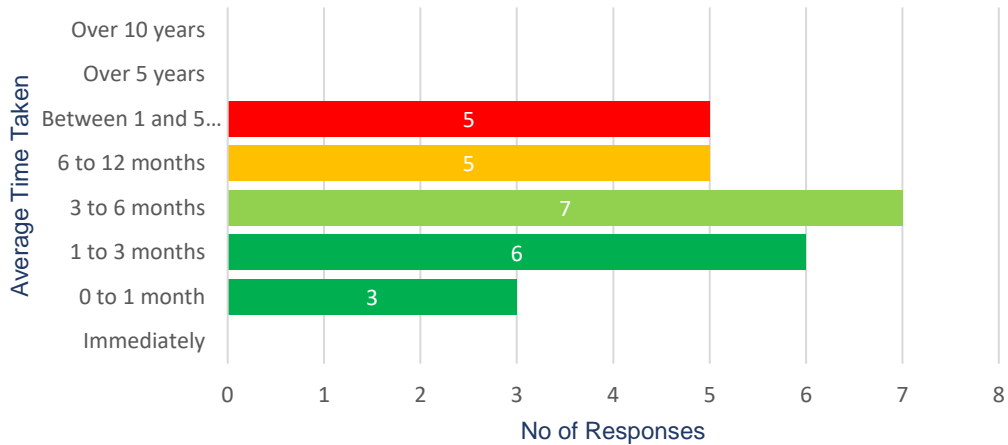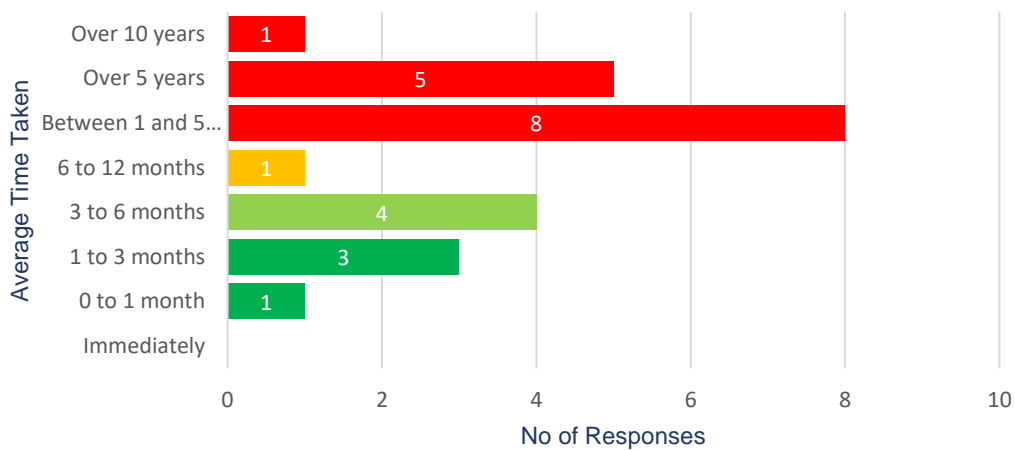
Question 23 considers what museums can access in terms of resources for conservation once material has been deposited:

Does your Museum have access to resources for conserving chance finds or assemblages?

No Response, 24%
Yes, 33%
No, 43%
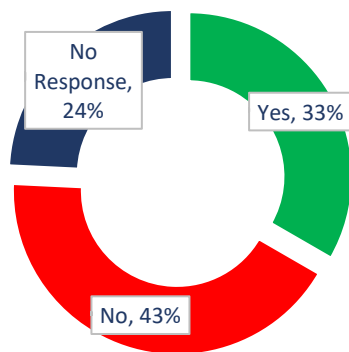
Does your Museum have access to resources for keeping chance finds or assemblages in a stable environment?

No Response, 15%
Yes, 21%
No, 64%
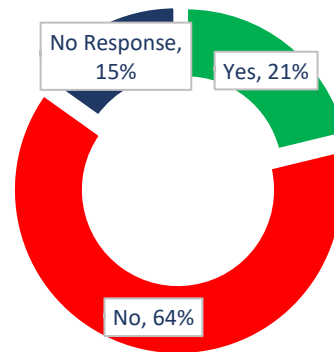
Question 24 asked how long does it currently take for new chance finds and assemblages with conservation requirements to be conserved to ensure their long-term preservation?

Average time taken before Chance Finds with conservation requirements are conserved by museums

Average Time Taken	No of Responses
Over 10 years	2
Over 5 years	2
Between 1 and 5...	13
6 to 12 months	4
3 to 6 months	2
1 to 3 months	3
0 to 1 month	2
Immediately	
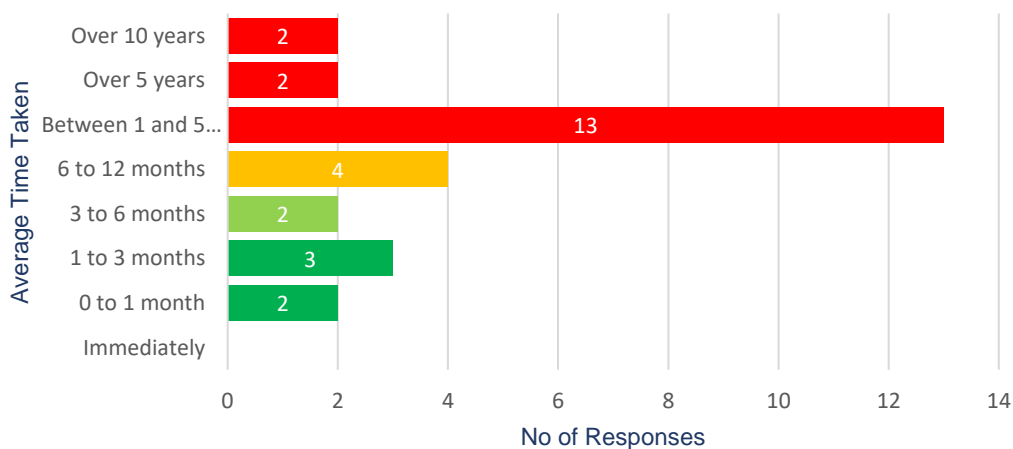
Average time taken before Assemblages with conservation requirements are conserved by museums
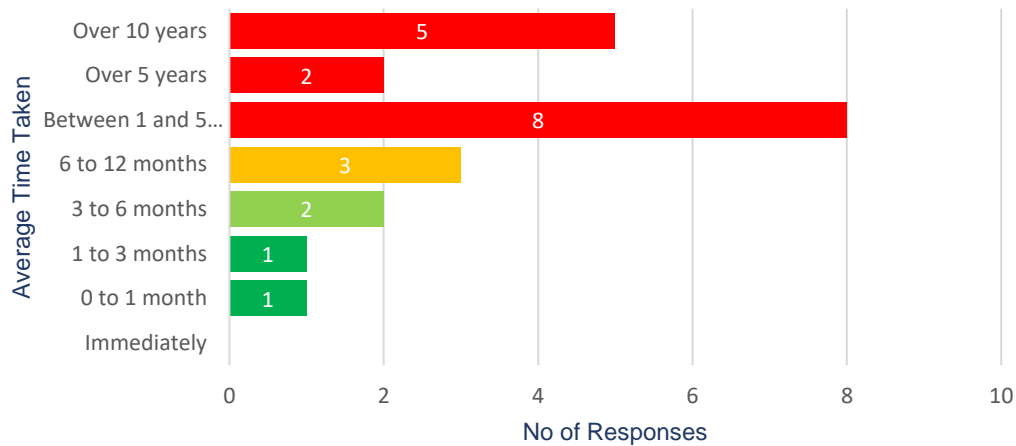
4.10   Size of Archaeological Collection and Backlog

The next group of questions focused on the wider museum archaeological collection, starting with Question 25 which asked museums for an estimate of the size of their archaeology collection. Answers were provided in two formats, either as an estimated total number of items or as an estimated total storage area in m^2. Some responses noted difficulties in estimating numbers owing to multiple items being catalogued under one entry, or in one instance the cataloguing system was under review which hindered the provision of accurate figures. Furthermore, two responses were provided as m^3, but these were converted to m^2 during the survey analysis stage to allow comparison. As such the spread of responses below should be read as indicative of the broad range of museums who responded, and the significant variation in the scale of the archaeological collections they hold.

Size of Archaeological Collection (answers provided as m^2)

Size of Archaeological Collection (answers provided as estimated number of artefacts)

Chart: X-axis "Individual Response No" (1–16), Y-axis "Size of collection in estimated numbers of artefacts" (0 to 1,800,000).

Values by response:
1: 20
2: 30
3: 150
4: 250
5: 500
6: 2,100
7: 3,558
8: 7,553
9: 8,000
10: 15,000
11: 25,000
12: 70,000
13: 100,000
14: 110,000
15: 750,000
16: 1,700,000
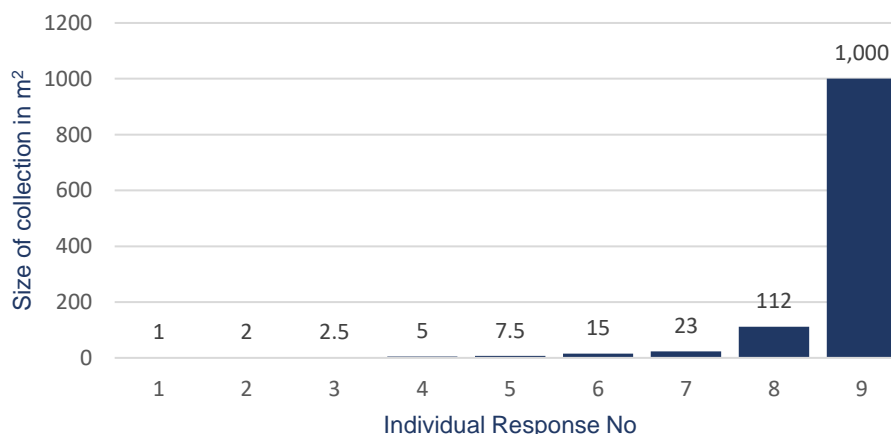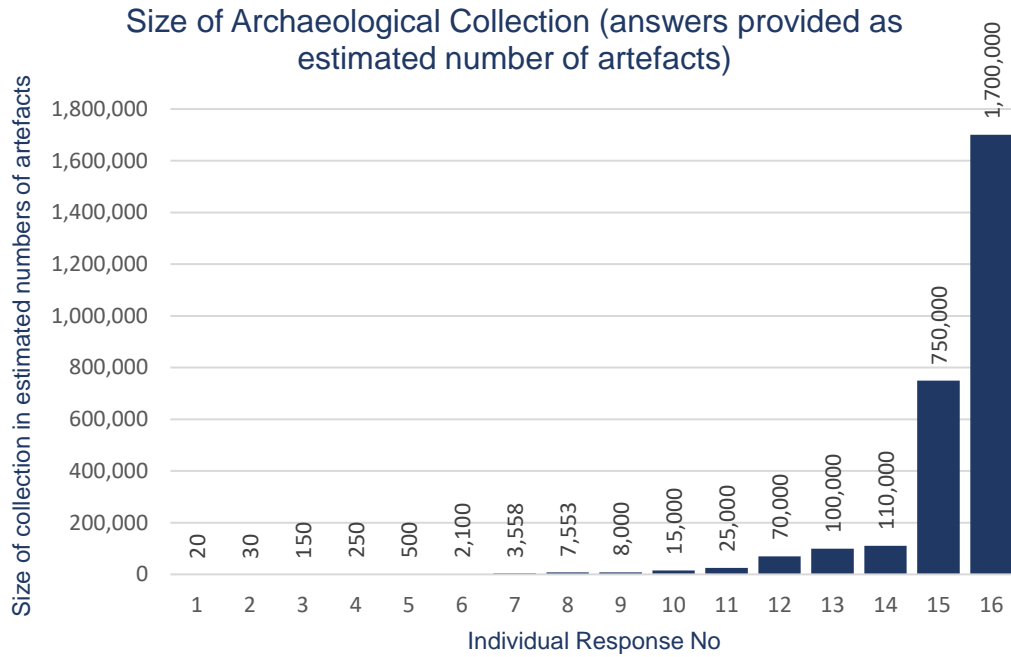
Question 26 asked for an estimated percentage of each museum's archaeology collection that is currently undocumented (i.e. it had not been added to the museum's collections management system). Responses used a sliding bar for choosing their percentage:

Estimated % of museum archaeology collections which are currently undocumented

Chart: X-axis "Percentage of Collection" (0–100), Y-axis "Number of Collections % Applies To" (0 to 4.5).
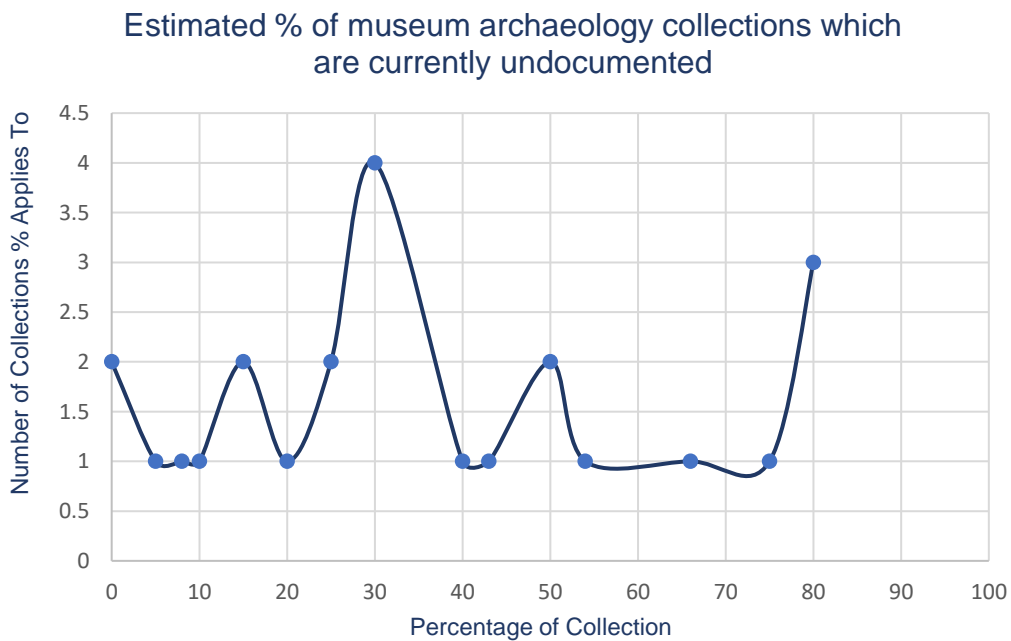
Question 27 asked about the estimated percentage of the archaeology collection which is currently in inappropriate packaging and storage. Responses used a sliding bar for choosing their percentage:

Estimated % of museum archaeology collections which are currently in inappropriate packaging and storage
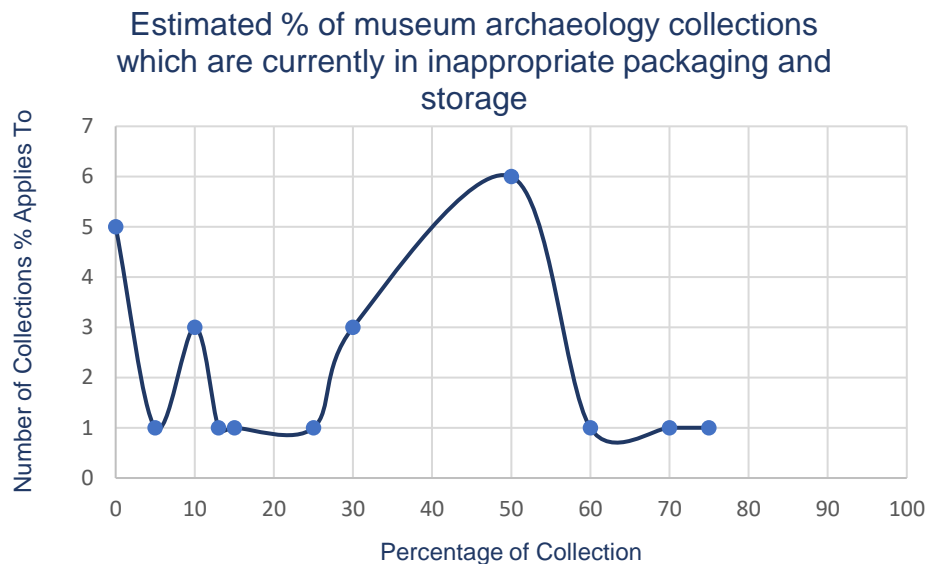
Question 28 asked about the estimated percentage of the archaeology collection which requires conservation. Responses used a sliding bar for choosing their percentage:

Estimated % of museum archaeology collections which currently require conservation
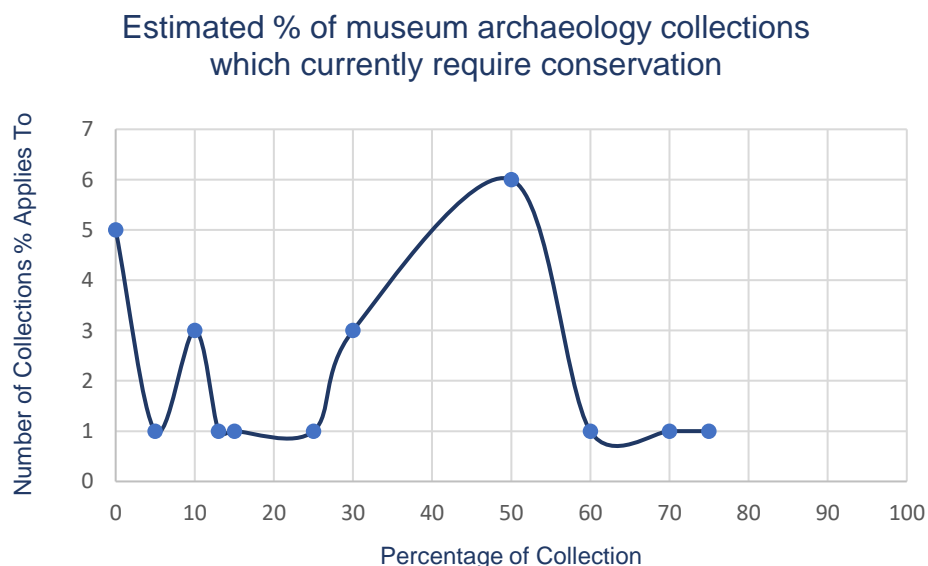
NB – the graphs for Q27 and Q28 are identical despite being based on two separate sets of answers.

4.11 **Suggestions for Improving Archaeological Archives**

Question 29 allowed respondents to provide further thoughts on what resources or changes could be made before the archaeological chance finds / assemblages reached them to make each of the processes (accessioning, cataloguing, care, and conservation) easier at their museum:

4.11.1 **Object Entry, Acquisition and Accessioning**

i. "Items accurately listed by box; documentation provided in widely compatible, standardised digitised format (e.g. pdf/Excel spreadsheet) to allow easy manipulation and extraction into museum system; this would usefully include any illustrations/photos etc. Spreadsheet updated to include specialist identifications, and remove any material rejected during post-excavation work (which should be separately itemised)."

ii. "Box lists, documentation for transfer of title."

iii. "We apply our own acquisition and documentation systems."

iv. "Better packing, labelling and documentation."

v. "None come to mind."

vi. "Better data and information, better Identification of artefacts, also having some means of matching the different numbering systems between publications, finds numbers, pit numbers, numbers on bags bear no relation to each other."

vii. "All finds to be accompanied by a spreadsheet in a suitable format for importing into our collections management system."

viii. "Have everything listed properly and fully - better packing lists."

ix. "Liaison with receiving museum to discuss requirements."

x. "Appropriate selection procedures, with discussion between units, TT and museums."

xi. "Extra staffing."

xii. "Increased workforce."

xiii. "Estimated number and size of boxes/ separate stones to allow museum to prepare storage space in advance."

xiv. "Far quicker turn round by TTU; funding for a curator with the relevant knowledge and skill to train and supervise."

xv. "Nothing to link the TT decision with that assemblage that could appear years – i.e. no TT case number attached to it."

4.11.2 Cataloguing

i. "Specialist catalogue entries included in same spreadsheet as above, or clearly cross-referenced. Spreadsheet updated with specialist identifications."

ii. "Box lists, specialist reports, final report."

iii. "Better packing, labelling and documentation."

iv. "None come to mind."

v. "Better data and information, better Identification of artefacts, also having some means of matching the different numbering systems between publications, finds numbers, pit numbers, numbers on bags bear no relation to each other."

vi. "All finds to be accompanied by a spreadsheet in a suitable format for importing into our collections management system."

vii. "Yes, photographing of key objects."

viii. "Liaison with receiving museum to discuss requirements, plus provision of DSR & publication text if published in a journal."

ix. "Excel spreadsheet with data to import into CMS."

x. "Appropriate selection procedures, with discussion between units, TT and museums."

xi. "Expert staffing."

xii. "Larger collections budget and more staff time."

xiii. "Full reports in PDF format that can be attached to the database records. Any hi-res images in TIFF (preferably) or JPEG format taken of the objects included as part of transfer."

xiv. "Guidelines to ensure that all assemblages arrive with the relevant report inside the box with the finds. Also, a digital copy/ CD/ PDF of each report also."

xv. "That same curator, and/or other paid staff resource."

xvi. "Brief overview with the assemblage giving very simple facts – e.g. Viking or Iron Age, reason for the excavation, how it fits in with other things of interest in the same area, and the key features for someone not from an archaeological background who is otherwise trying to pick out key points from a weighty academic report which is full of jargon /technical terms."

4.11.3   Condition Checking and Collections Care

i. "Suitable packing and held in a suitable environment in pre-allocation storage and transit."

ii. "Provision of x-rays; material packaged according to its storage requirements e.g. metalwork and worked bone shouldn't be in the same box."

iii. "Better packing, labelling and documentation."

iv. "Would be a must to be done by experts."

v. "None come to mind."

vi. "To think about how they store and pack material, also if there is something particularly vulnerable contained in the box to highlight this on the box label. Maybe set up a categorization code system for the boxes."

vii. "All material to arrive in standardised packing which fits on our shelves."

viii. "Yes."

ix. "Everything cleaned and stabilised by a conservator, and also use standard guidelines for packaging and labelling."

x. "Condition report, appropriate packaging."

xi. "Improved packaging and stabilised objects; appropriate selection procedures."

xii. "Extra staffing."

xiii. "Increased staff time and expertise in fields such as caring for iron objects."

xiv. "All condition reports included with objects in PDF format along with any recommendations from experts. Object bag labelling done in format laid out by museum so they do not have to re-bag the objects."

xv. "Ensure that any unstable materials are clearly marked on the box/ bag and preventive measures taken if possible prior to arrival to museum, i.e. silicon desiccant packs inside boxes of metal. Also ensure boxes are packed properly i.e. heavy materials on base and smaller more fragile material on top. Particularly important for pottery sherds to prevent further damage."

xvi. "Far quicker turn round by TTU; funding for a curator with the relevant knowledge and skill to train and supervise.""

xvii. "Correct packaging used so that it doesn't create work and expense for us."

4.11.4 Conservation

i. "All metals X-rayed, with X-rays supplied (preferably digitally); all significant metal finds actively conserved, not just passively supported in a climate controlled environment (by significant, we suggest: all finds from secure contexts, apart from bulk finds such as nails; all typologically diagnostic pre-modern finds) and stored appropriately since excavation. All organic materials (wood, leather etc) actively conserved. Conservation records provided digitally."

ii. "There is no budget for conservation. External funding has to be sought if there are any requirements to do this for display or preservation. Remedial conservation needs to be carried out prior to deposition. Wet organic remains, in particular, need to be dealt with before being deposited."

iii. "Better packing, labelling and documentation."

iv. "Would be a must to be done by experts."

v. "None come to mind."

vi. "Material should be stored to be as stable as possible, depending on its requirements."

vii. "Funding from excavator/developer."

viii. "Yes."

ix. "Everything cleaned and stabilised by a conservator."

x. "Conservation actioned - or recommendations that could form a funding application to undertake remedial work."

xi. "Closer discussion between units and museums to ensure key finds are conserved."

xii. "Objects fully conserved before arriving."

xiii. "Funding, specialised staffing."

xiv. "Finances and expertise advice."

xv. "Full PDF reports of any conservation treatments included with objects."

xvi. "Ensure that any unstable materials are clearly marked on the box/ bag and preventive measures taken if possible prior to arrival to museum, i.e. silicon desiccant packs inside boxes of metal. Also ensure boxes are packed properly i.e. heavy materials on base and smaller more fragile material on top. Particularly important for pottery sherds to prevent further damage."

xvii. "Conservation integrated with deposition by TTU whether received as assemblage or chance finds. Even a meaningful indication of conservation required when bidding unseen."

xviii. "Basic cleaning and conservation should already have happened before it arrives with us. A reduction of sample sizes to help with our storage issues."

4.12 General Comments about Survey Answers

Question 30 asked for any other comments in relation to the answers that the respondents had given (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "Unfortunately, I have limited knowledge of the archaeology collections which we hold as much of it is not currently on our CMS, and I only started my current role *recently* so haven't become fully familiar with the collection. As such most of my answers are estimates or from what I know of what was typical before I was in post, so I don't know if this will be of much help to the project!"

ii. "To expand a few of the answers: Q9: We have standards and guidelines regarding the acquisition, transfer of title, transportation, entry, quarantining, cataloguing, condition checking, storage of objects, managing human remains etc (Collections Manual). Q13: number of chance finds is the number of TT cases, which may be single items, groups or hoards, so the number of finds is higher than this Q21, 22, 26: at an assemblage level, the situation looks OK (<1% of assemblages are not on our database at assemblage level), but a very small % of the assemblages we have acquired since PPG16 are fully registered at an item level, probably less than 10%, and this represents a significant amount of work for which we currently have no resources.   Q28: In terms of urgently needing conservation, archaeological ironwork pre-1100 from a number of sites; and almost all recent TT acquisitions; plus a lot of medieval non-ferrous metals. Other materials requiring attention are notably fewer."

iii. "An archive should only be deposited when all the reporting has been finished and any recommendations made by finds specialists have been implemented, including disposal."

iv. "All assemblages arrive with satisfactory documentation."

v. "Improvements are needed both before and once in the museum, so critical is the resources to enable the time to be devoted to these tasks - an element of developer funding is one way forward."

vi. "Many of our issues could be resolved if more staff hours were made available, so increased funding for recruitment is crucial to improving our ability to care for the collection properly. Our collections staff hours has been halved over the last 3 years."

vii. "I am answering this at home with the Museum in lockdown and haven't been in for nearly 3 months. It is not possible to discuss the answers with another volunteer colleague while completing the form. Last winter we became aware of the extent of our in-house problems extending to all our Spectrum procedures as they affect the whole collection not just archaeology, with a new backlog and with loss of Location and Movement

Control. We are working towards regaining control, and while isolated from the Museum, we are preparing for an Inventory. For the archaeology, much of the problem has arisen through what we perceive as an understaffing at TTU, with confusion over returned/retained objects, and some historically deposited assemblages which have never been adequately addressed."

4.13 General Comments about the Project Aims

Question 32 provided a final opportunity for museums to add comments about the overall project and the issues it is attempting to address (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "Thank you for the list of resources at the start of the survey, I will definitely be doing some further reading to gain guidance for this area of the collections."

ii. "In the early *decade* I was Keeper of Archaeology at the *name of museum*. I liaised with commercial archaeology units undertaking fieldwork in the region to develop a set of guidelines for deposition with the museum. I am also a freelance small finds specialist and have been involved with on-going discussions regarding transfer of archives and capacity issues in museums in the UK."

iii. "A continual issue is the pressure of time and limited "curatorial" knowledge and resources within our own organisation."

iv. "Our archaeology collection is small and consists of stable materials such as pieces of flint, stone axeheads, medieval brooches and coins from Elizabeth I's reign to 18th century European(mainly silver)."

v. "Our archaeological archive material has varying quality of packing and care from the excavators. Better in recent years. One of our problems comes later on when researchers want to use their material, often many years later, for new research papers - the numbering systems differ, finds numbers bear no relation to the numbers or descriptions in the published articles, and unless something has been illustrated it can be very difficult to marry the two. This

can cause many hours of searching and stress by staff to accommodate research requests."

vi. "Not really applicable as most items would go to *name of museum* and Archives."

vii. "We have completed this as requested by MGS but are aware that the almost complete absence of archaeological material in collections may have skewed data, and also aware that many answers have been left blank, so apologies for this."

viii. "Some of the issues we face are retrospective ones. Whilst we welcome the improvements in standards going forward, we are still dealing with the consequences of previous practices."

ix. "We need to work closer with depositing organisations in the future before an assemblage is accepted. Chance finds are much less of an issue, but large assemblages are a huge problem now for us. We no longer have storage space or staff time to deal with them. Ongoing annual budget cuts have reduced our ability to access conservation and so we can no longer care for the collection to the standards that we used to in the past. As a curator this is a huge frustration in my working life which weighs heavily on my conscience - that, due to cutbacks, I can no longer care for the collection to the standard I would like."

x. "Many of the issues in *name of museum* collections stem from the backlog that was excavated *years ago.* Although the bulk of the items are on the Collections Management System many of the catalogue records are very basic and the historic digital filing system can be hard to navigate and to link up images, files, reports, etc. The loss of expertise has been a challenge to fully completing the cataloguing of the collection to SPECTRUM standards."

xi. "If you sent me this in Word format I could answer more meaningfully. If I could get back into the Museum I could get to grips with some of our in-house difficulties but ultimately, we need a curator with a broad background but including local archaeology."

xii. "One of our biggest problems (as in many museums) is the size of assemblages and therefore only what is needed to be preserved should be deposited and therefore reducing the size of samples should be undertaken by the archaeologists as part of getting them museum ready."

4.14   Part 1 Key Conclusions and Recommendations

4.14.1 Awareness of guidelines for archiving

Guidelines created and distributed by the Collections Trust, and Museums and Galleries Scotland, are widely used across the sector, in particular the 'SPECTRUM UK Collection Management Standard for Museum Collections and Resources'. Furthermore, a high reliance is placed on specialist reports submitted by conservators or finds experts. The remaining guides and documents, both those listed within the survey questionnaire, and those noted in addition within the responses, are known of by circa 39% of the sector but used by only circa 9%. The gaps in knowledge are also highlighted by only 58% of respondents feeling that the guidelines they used met all their needs. Furthermore, 39% of respondents use their own in-house set of guidelines for the deposition of archives, although at this stage it is unclear how these documents align with national recommendations.

Only 27% of respondents said they received training from their respective museums in the care, documentation, and management of archaeological archives. This reflects both the small-scale nature of some of the archaeological collections within museums which makes training less of a priority, and the number of volunteers involved in running museums who can only be trained on an ad-hoc basis.

Recommendation 1 – Review all available guidelines and best practice documentation available for the management of archaeological archives, agree on those to be used within the sector in Scotland with signposting from a single online resource, undertake a programme of awareness raising of the selected standards. This

includes the recently published SMA Guidelines which became available only after this survey was issued.

4.14.2 Availability of collecting policies

While the majority of museum collecting policies for chance finds and assemblages are available to view, only circa 60% are available online.

Recommendation 2 – Collate and standardise the way archaeological collecting priorities are expressed, then publish all museum collecting policies relating to archaeological material in a single online resource.

4.14.3 Origin of and experiences with deposited archives

Most chance finds and 95% of all assemblages taken in by museums each year follow on from allocation via the Treasure Trove process. However, at best only circa 50% of museums have a regular liaison period with the depositing individual or organisation. The principal issue appears to be the perception that Treasure Trove acts as a natural barrier in the process, thereby removing any direct contact between depositor and receiver because one is not aware of who the other is / is going to be. Furthermore, there appear to be ongoing communication issues (not by any means in all cases) between depositors and museums owing to a lack of mutual understanding of the benefits of engaging as early in the handover process as possible.

Recommendation 3 – Review the options for improving early communication between those generating archaeological material and those who will eventually receive it, while taking into consideration the legal constraints of Treasure Trove, or presuppose the decision making of Scottish Archaeological Finds and Allocations Panel.

Recommendation 4 – Notifications to stakeholders is expanded by Treasure Trove to include non-claimed archaeological material in order to track the

complete life history of chance finds and assemblages, and to increase opportunities for such materials to supplement teaching and outreach resources.

4.14.4 Condition of deposited archives

On average museums considered that 55% of all chance finds and archaeological assemblages deposited with them arrived in a state not deemed by them to be 'museum ready'. There is a wide-ranging understanding of what is meant by the term 'museum ready', and this lack of a single approach for the sector has resulted in confusion and regular lapses in acceptable standards.

Chance finds are more likely to have issues with the boxes and packaging in which they arrive than assemblages. Both types of archive suffer from instances of a lack of cleaning, basic conservation or lack of conservation, and lack of documentation. Assemblages are generally better labelled and have documentation in an accessible format. The biggest issues appear to occur in long-standing research excavations where lack of proper resourcing, and the time-lag between excavation and deposition of the archive, leads to multiple issues in terms of the state of the assemblage.

Recommendation 5 – Create and implement a standard Scotland-wide definition of 'museum ready' guidance for the deposition of assemblages, with checklists and templates as required.

Recommendation 6 – Review options for introducing a museum 'processing fee' to aid museums in dealing with common issues of accepting archaeological archives.

4.14.5 Average time for processing archives

Chance finds are, on average accessioned 85% of the time within one year of arriving at a museum, and on average are then catalogued 80% of the time within one year. The conservation requirements of chance finds however is on

average only undertaken 40% of the time within one year (and indeed 15% of the time it takes five or more years for such an assessment).

Assemblages on the other hand average an accession rate of 60% of the time within one year of being deposited at a museum, and on average are then catalogued just 40% of the time within one year. The conservation requirements of assemblages on average is undertaken 32% of the time within one year (and 32% of the time it takes five or more years for such an assessment).

Recommendation 7 – Review accessioning and cataloguing processes within museums to better understand the issues which cause delay, and develop recommended changes for improving completion times.

Recommendation 8 – Develop and implement standard templates for highlighting conservation work that has been completed up to the point of deposition / and/or future requirements based on a scale of urgency, the template designed to be completed by the depositing individual / organisation.

4.14.6 Size of archaeological collections and associated backlogs

While the size of the archaeological collections held by the museums who responded to the survey varied from one extreme to the other across Scotland, nearly all of them reported a backlog of material that remains undocumented, with the national average standing at 35%. Furthermore, within the archaeology collections as a whole an average of 28% of them are stored in inappropriate packaging and storage locations, and have outstanding conservation requirements.

Recommendation 9 – Each museum undertakes an audit to fully understand the scale of their backlogs and any issues with the archaeology collection, and then develops a priority programme of work, either just for the archaeology collection or as part of a wider

programme dealing with the overall museum collection.

Recommendation 10 – Given that resources within museums for managing the archaeological collections are limited alternative avenues of support should be considered and presented in an options report (e.g. working with university archaeology and museum studies courses to provide practical skills and experiences for students whilst supporting the work of the museums).

Recommendation 11 – Stop all non-processed environmental and soil samples from being passed to museums, unless agreed in writing in advance. All such samples should be dealt with by the individual or organisation that generated them, prior to any consideration of an assemblage being deposited with a museum.

4.14.7 Suggestions for improving archaeological archives included more standardisation of information supplied with deposited chance finds and assemblages, better cross reference between numbering systems used (e.g. between publications, finds lists, finds bags, TT number), improved communication between parties, increased resources, better information about what is actually being deposited (including number of boxes, what they contain, significance etc.), standardisation of packing finds and assemblages, and improved documentation detailing conservation requirements.

Recommendation 12 – 'Before the Museum' Project reviews all suggestions and develops templates and guidelines where possible for improving the deposition process. This includes consideration of better rationalisation criteria for chance finds which aligns with that undertaken for assemblages.

Two comments made within the survey neatly encapsulate many of the problems highlighted by the museums:

"Some of the issues we face are retrospective ones. Whilst we welcome the improvements in standards going forward, we are still dealing with the consequences of previous practices."

"We need to work closer with depositing organisations in the future before an assemblage is accepted. Chance finds are much less of an issue, but large assemblages are a huge problem now for us. We no longer have storage space or staff time to deal with them. Ongoing annual budget cuts have reduced our ability to access conservation and so we can no longer care for the collection to the standards that we used to in the past."

5   Survey Part 2 – Responses from Depositing Organisations

5.1   Organisation Response Summary

A total of 12 usable responses were received for the section of the survey designed specifically for commercial archaeological companies, universities, and other types of organisations (i.e. those who find, generate, process and deposit chance finds or archaeological assemblages to museums). There is therefore a maximum potential of 12 responses for any given question. Question 50 applied to information about the responding organisation and has been included in Section 3 above.

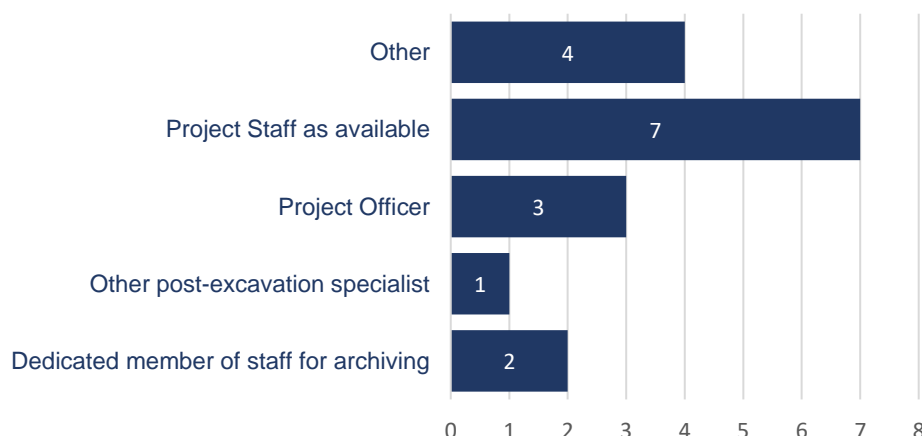### 5.2   Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Profile

Question 33 asked whether the organisation was a Registered Organisation with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists:

	Yes	No	No Response
Registered Organisation with Chartered Institute for Archaeologists?	3	6	3

5.3   Training and Average Times for Processing Archives

The first set of questions (Questions 34 to 38) for non-museum organisations sought information about the archiving process undertaken prior to deposition at a museum. Question 34 began by asking who within their organisation prepares archaeological archives for museum deposition:
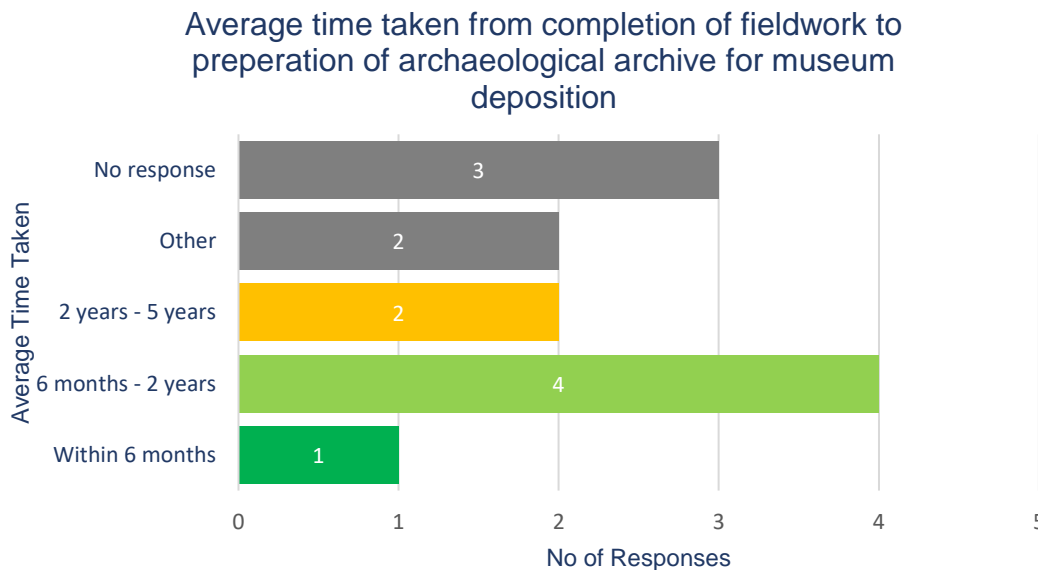
Who in the Organisation prepares archaeological
archives for museum deposition

Category	Value
Other	4
Project Staff as available	7
Project Officer	3
Other post-excavation specialist	1
Dedicated member of staff for archiving	2

49

Where an organisation has selected 'Other' they were asked to provide further details:

i. "Single person company so me."

ii. "We hold some excavated material which has not been fully archived and processed through TT - but our work in the main covers accessioned collections, we are not a depositor in the main."

iii. "Technicians and trained students."

iv. "For trust projects we outsource post ex to commercial units."

Question 35 asked how quickly, on average, after the fieldwork element of a project is complete the organisation prepares the archaeological archive for museum deposition and report it to Treasure Trove:

Average time taken from completion of fieldwork to preperation of archaeological archive for museum deposition

Average Time Taken	No of Responses
No response	3
Other	2
2 years - 5 years	2
6 months - 2 years	4
Within 6 months	1

Where an organisation has selected 'Other' they were asked to provide further details:

i. "Often longer than 5 years. There is no real timeframe for this as it depends on how quickly the materials from a project are studied and published. It is a matter that we try to solve and create a more formalised methodology."

ii. "Hugely variable, non-px projects <6mths; mod px 6mths - 2yrs but can be longer depending on contract."

Question 36 asked whether the organisation provides training for staff in archaeological archiving to museum standards:

Does your Organisation provide staff training in archaeological archiving to museum standards?


No Response, 25%
No, 17%
Yes, 58%
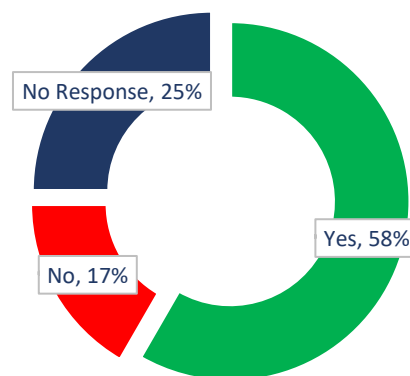
Where the respondent selected 'Yes' to Question 36, they were asked in Question 37 to provide further details:

i. "In house training, attendance at CIfA courses when available, HES provided in-house training on digital archives to all staff."

ii. "I read guidelines so that would count as training."

iii. "Staff is instructed on an ad hoc basis to follow TT & HES guidance."

iv. "Informal in-house training is conducted by allowing time to remain familiar with current archiving standards."

v. "In-house training based on current best practice."

vi. "In-house training and supervision by a dedicated officer, the staff completing the role being project staff. This may not match museum standards."

5.4   Awareness of Guidelines for Archiving

Question 38 considered which resources or documents relating to archaeological archiving that the organisations were aware of, and which of these they currently use. Where a response indicated that an organisation used a particular document, but had left the corresponding 'Are you aware of this document?' tick box blank, it has been assumed that the 'Aware' tick box should have been ticked as well, based on the fact that they are actively using the document. The results below reflect this adjustment.
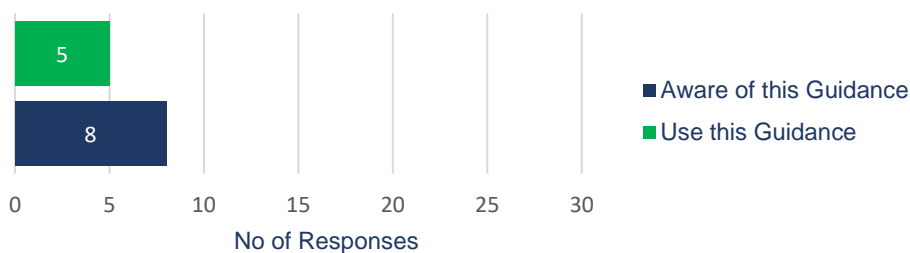
SPECTRUM UK Collection Management Standard for Museum Collections and Resources (Collections Trust)
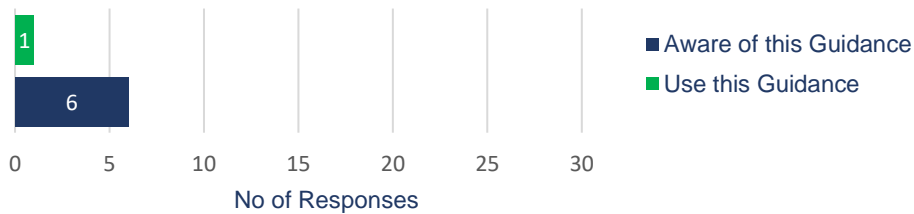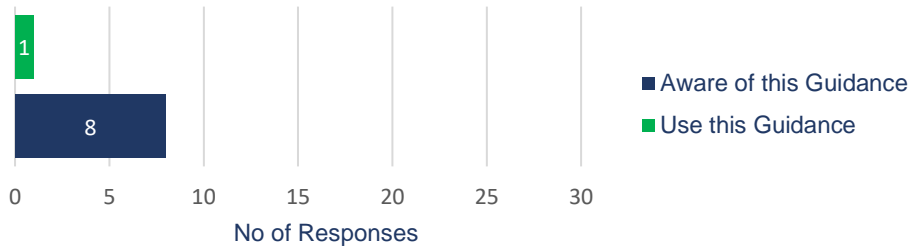

Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections (Collections Trust)
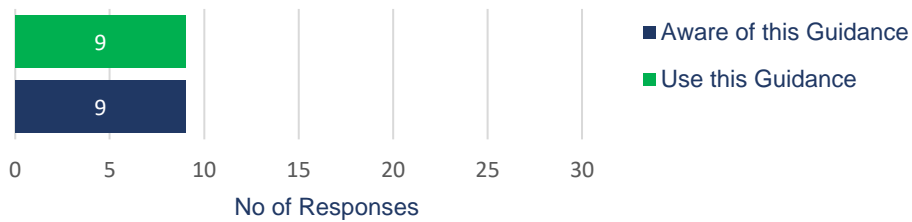

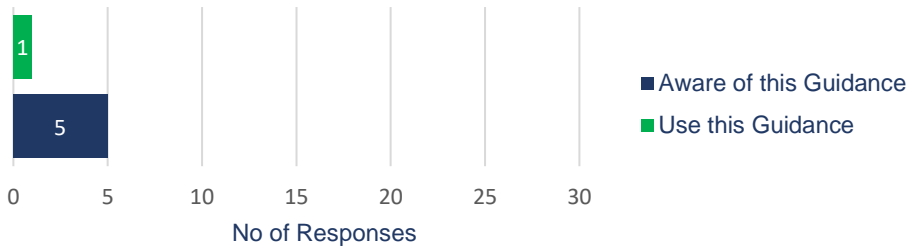### MGS Guidelines (for human remains)
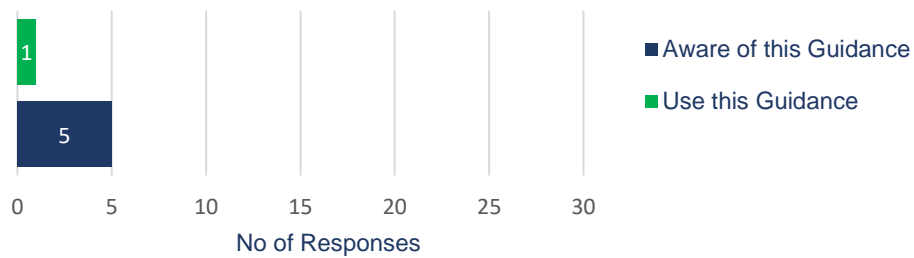
ICON Guidelines and Standards

■ Aware of this Guidance
■ Use this Guidance

No of Responses

CIfA Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives

■ Aware of this Guidance
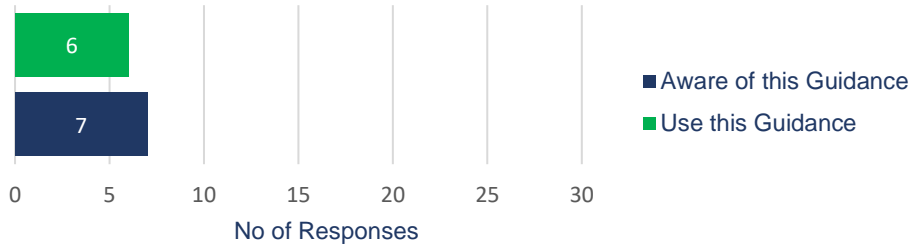■ Use this Guidance

No of Responses

Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) website
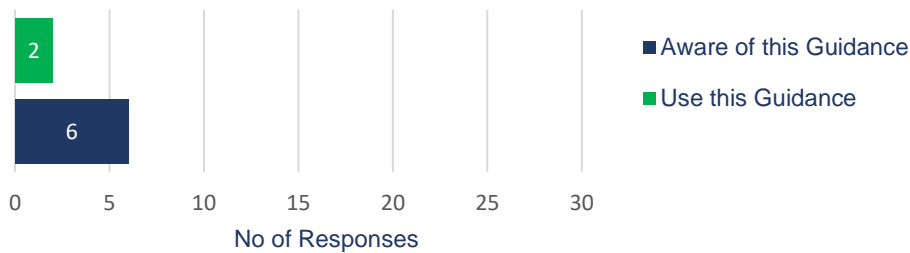

■ Aware of this Guidance
■ Use this Guidance

No of Responses

AAF publication 'Archaeological Archives A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation'

■ Aware of this Guidance
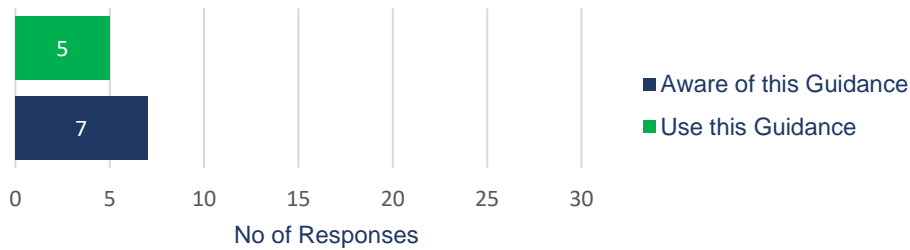■ Use this Guidance

No of Responses

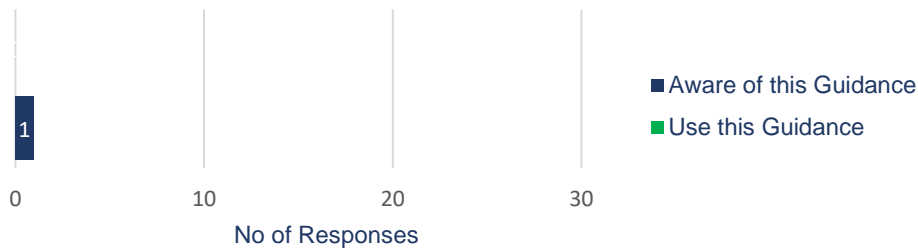## Information from finds specialists/ conservators

- Aware of this Guidance
- Use this Guidance

Archaeology Data Services (ADS) online 'Archaeological Resources in Cultural Heritage: a European Standard'

- Aware of this Guidance
- Use this Guidance

HES Archaeological Objects Thesaurus (Scotland)

- Aware of this Guidance
- Use this Guidance

Other Terminology or Thesauri

- Aware of this Guidance
- Use this Guidance

In addition to the resources listed in the question, organisations were invited to submit the names of other resources which they use, but no responses to this option were given.

When asked in follow-up Question 39 as to whether these resources / documents provide all the necessary information the organisations need for preparing an archaeological archive for a museum, the following responses were given:

Do these resources / documents provide all the necessary information for preparing a museum archive?
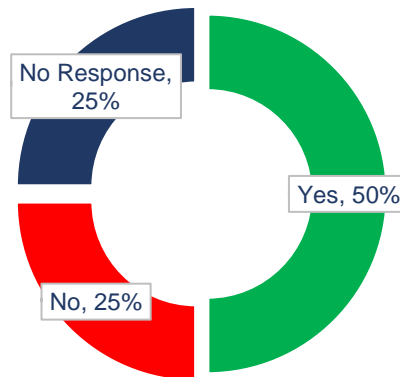
This would suggest that while there is good awareness and use of guidance produced by Museums & Galleries Scotland, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, and specialist reports submitted with specific objects or assemblages, there are still enough gaps in knowledge within the wider sector for preparing archaeological archives to cause issues. Question 40 allowed respondents to provide further comment:

i. "They mostly provide best practice rather than a clear and standardised format."

ii. "The combination of all the above resources / documents provide some of the basic information for preparing archives. However, some items such as metals require special treatment from the moment that are collected from the ground before they reach the museum. Guidance on the temporary storage of specific types of artefacts immediately after excavation is hard to find. One big problem that I encounter is that artefacts that are stored for short or long periods of time before they are prepared for museum deposition are badly preserved and thus their later preparation for archiving becomes problematic. Obviously, when

artefacts are kept away from museums for long periods this problem increases."

iii. "The resources provide sufficient information and guidance for most purposes. Consultation with the receiving museum resolves any other issues."

iv. "To our perception the ones we use do, as we submit archives and they are accepted without criticism."

Question 41 asked whether their organisation has an in-house set of standards or guidelines that are used to govern the creation and deposition of museum archives:

Does your Organisation have its own in-house standards
or guidelines for the deposition of museum archives?
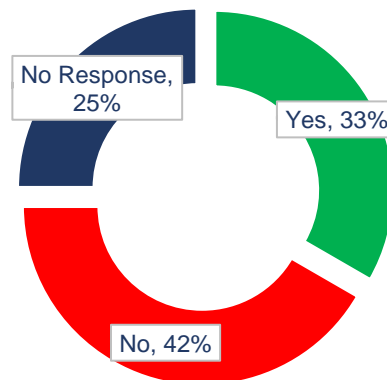
Question 42 followed this up by asking, if yes to the above question, would you be willing to share a copy of these documents with the project team by email which produced the following result:

	Yes	No	No Response
Would you be happy to share your in-house documents with the project?	2	2	0

5.5   Availability of Resources for Processing Archives

The next set of questions (Question 43 to 45) considered what resources are available for organisations for dealing with archaeological chance finds and assemblages prior to deposition with a museum. Question 43 began by asking which of a range of services they offer in-house:

Which of these services do you offer in-house?
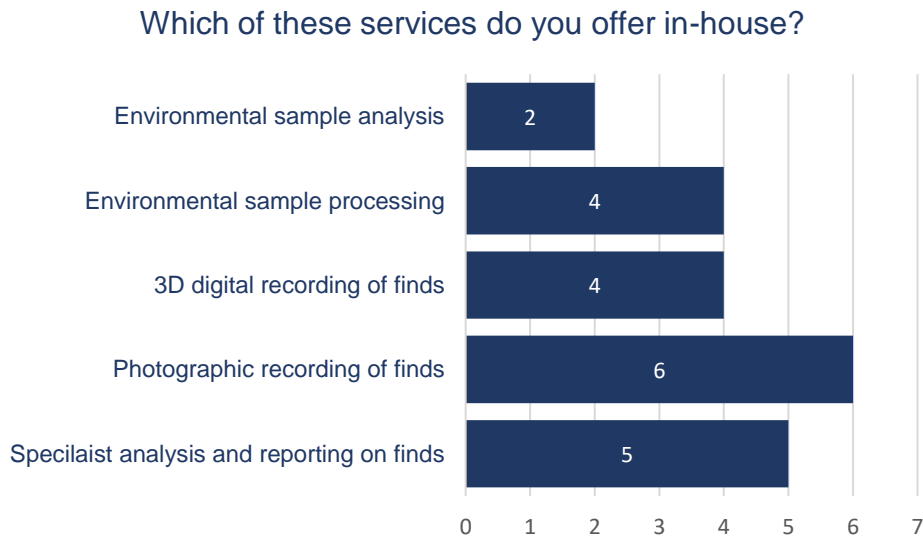
Respondents were also asked to provide further details on any other services relevant to museum archives:

    i.   "We would contract out most conservation work and any sample processing/analysis to an archaeological unit."

   ii.   "Palynological and soil micromorphological recording and analysis, sample core curation."

 iii.   "Artefact illustration."

 iv.   "None at present."

Question 44 asked about the type of storage facilities organisations have access to for archives before they are deposited with a museum:

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Which of these storage facilities do you have access to?
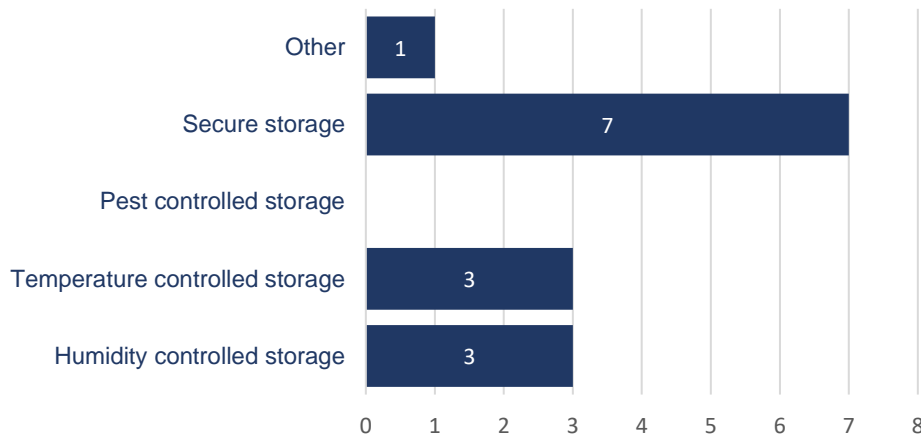
The one 'Other' response provided the following additional detail:

i. "Appropriate racked dry and cool storage within the main offices of the company incl. refrigerated storage (small) and secure (safe)."

Of particular concern is the apparent lack of pest control, and the threat both to the material being stored locally, and the subsequent issue of passing that threat on to a museum.

5.6   Liaison with Museums

Question 45 asked whether the organisation usually has a period of liaison with the museum accepting the archive prior to deposition (e.g. to access information about collection policy, retention / discard policy and archive requirements):

Does your Organisation usually have a period of liaison with the museum prior to deposition of chance finds / assemblages?
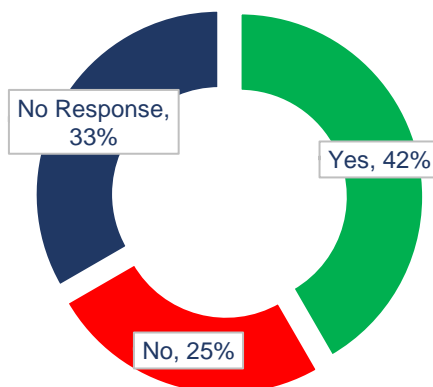
Question 46 allowed respondents to provide further comment on Question 45:

i.   "So far my assemblages have been small and uncomplicated."

ii.   "We do not usually act as depositor."

iii.   "Personal links mean we are also aware of UK-wide and English developments in retention, curation, archiving, etc."

iv.   "Only one Museum Service we regularly deposit with actively engages with us and there we do adapt our preparation of the archive to meet their desires. We have seen requests to discard portions of the assemblage prior to declaration that are 'not significant'. We have yet to receive any explanation as to how this is compatible with the law as we do not hold title to the assemblage hence cannot dispose of it, only surrender it to its legal owner / holder. Likewise I do not understand the relevance of a museum's collection and / or retention / discard policy for exactly the same reason - if they can agree discard with the Crown, then grand but we have no legal standing to dispose and until claimed / allocated do not know the recipient museum. We continue to hold assemblages that derive from sites disclaimed by the Crown but where legal ownership was uncertain."

Question 47 sought further clarification on the archive preparation process by asking whether the organisation double checks that all archives are 'museum ready' as defined by the professional standards their organisation adheres to, if any, upon transfer to a museum (i.e. at the time of transferring the archive, as opposed to when the finds were first boxed up as this could be several years before deposition):

Does your Organisation usually check whether archives are 'museum ready'?

No Response, 42%

Yes, 41%

No, 17%
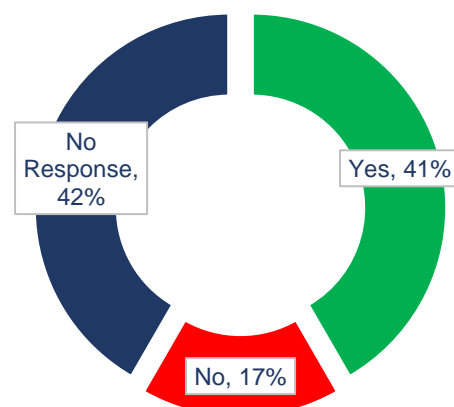
Question 48 provided an opportunity for further comment:

i. "During lockdown I have been through all boxes rechecking silica gel etc and will do this before transfer."

ii. "We are not usually a depositor.""

iii. "A severe backlog of archives for deposition has been addressed and reduced by an on-going programme, and by changing the way funds for deposition of commercial archaeology archives are retained and channelled."

iv. "The assemblage is museum-ready on declaration. If that process and the transfer takes time, that does not change the standards it was prepared to."

v. "There is a very basic check for travel but objects are not re-bagged or put in achieve stable boxes as this would be expensive and time consuming."

5.7 Experiences of the Depositing Process

Question 49 allowed respondents to provide further thoughts on what the major challenges are within the existing process of excavating finds > processing finds > Treasure Trove > museum deposition:

i. "Storage of sensitive materials, time between reporting and deposit, when reporting to TT they do not send reports to museums and so museum contact me to send reports before they decide if they want to bid - not really a problem for me as it's few cases but for bigger bodies this must be time-consuming."

ii. "Some of the major challenges are a result of a lack of shared awareness of the processes on each side of the TT allocation - archaeological post excavation / archiving aim to make the assemblage accessible but are not generally undertaken with the subsequent specific museum accession / documentation processes in mind. Equally museum technicians / curators / managers / volunteers are not necessarily

familiar with archaeological processes so can't always translate the preparation of an assemblage easily. Creating more of a shared process of recording which allows both areas of specialism to capture what's required would be beneficial. Some issues can also arise from a lack of willingness on either side to carry out due rationalisation of assemblages, particularly on the archaeological side - a standard rationalisation of samples and of finds assemblages by the excavators / post-ex specialists after post-ex research is complete would assist in creating a clearer representation of the result of the work for necessary archiving and deposition and avoid scenarios of over retention. Museums may simply assume that if they have received material it has been deemed significant enough to retain, and may not be best placed to or willing to rationalise after allocation especially given what may be varied levels of in house archaeological expertise. There's a fundamental need to see the end point of the archaeological process as the museum accessioning process rather than as the deposition of the material with TT - this would encourage communication and possibly even joint working where beneficial (I can see lots of trainees / volunteers / students being eager to work with material in both contexts), and allow standards / processes / knowledge to become less polarised. It would be useful to look for ways to reflect this in the set-up of archaeology where feasible e.g. in project specifications / sign-off for commercial projects, stipulation for grant funding etc. Lots of challenges in this as the sectors are set up very differently and the expertise of both is required at different stages, but it would be useful to view an archaeological project as a continuous process until accessible in a museum collection, rather than as the end of the archaeological process and beginning of the museum process either side of TT."

iii. "I think the major challenge is that a lot of academic research projects do not include in their initial WSI or application fund specific plans for the later storage / archiving of the excavated finds. Also, the fact that there is

not any official document giving specific guidelines for the appropriate way(s) to store specific types of artefacts immediately after excavation creates further problems when it comes to the stage of preparation for archiving. Individuals' experience plays an important part here, but I believe that we need a more unified approach. Furthermore, the limited funding (and occasionally the bad management of funds) is a major issue here, as most projects will prefer to produce information from the excavation and analysis of finds rather than spend money on packing materials and paid time on the preparation of finds for archiving."

iv. "Archiving of a project is not always given the appropriate priority. Will long term storage space meet demand?"

v. "Weak links are: a) lack of knowledge and recognition of different finds materials and types by inexperienced excavators b) the storage of finds on site before their transfer to our holding facility c) alerting receiving museum to the exact extent, nature, and requirements of assemblages."

vi. "Excavating Finds - no challenges of note that have not been coped with by our staff team, drawing on resources from the broader archaeological community. Processing Finds - we have regularly committed as a company to pre-emptive cleaning and stabilising of finds prior to agreement of PX programmes given the time lag that often ensues. This can be at financial risk to the company. Access to some specialisms can prove challenging and laborious. Treasure Trove - historically we have experienced long delays in processing cases, we have cases 18 months+ which are being claimed but a museum has not yet been allocated. This results in shelf-blocking in our stores. We also have repeated problems from needing to submit 19th and 20th century material that should be dealt with quickly but seems to be lying at the bottom of the decision pile. Historically query response seems poor, staff have seen poor engagement to problems with process. Museum Deposition - museums expect that it is our responsibility to deliver the

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Crown's material to them, and can be intolerant of the substantial (and variable) burden this places on us. We are not a courier service."

vii. "Treasure Trove takes far far too long to make declarations, so material sits in storage for a long time and the likelihood of loss of material is greatly increased. There are no standards within planning for archive of material that can then be justifiably passed to the client (we don't need to provide archive stable boxes and they are expensive so why would we?) Small local museums (even accredited ones) are not always aware material is coming up and we don't know when they will be declared so can't tell them."

viii. "TT time issues and backlog, though with new personnel this seems to be better now. Some issues from LAA point of view with archives being deposited and claimed by museums then considered not suitably archived after the event, followed by reluctance to allow re-assessment and further conservation of material with new finds etc. Still very much a feeling that museums are closed doors, and not entirely communicative between each other either."

5.8   General Comments about the Project Aims

Question 51 provided a final opportunity for Organisations to add comments about the overall project and the issues it is attempting to address (note text in italics is an editor's change to preserve anonymity):

i. "I'm a small company and so not big assemblages, so mostly smooth and not big storage problem. Dealings with TT and archives, museums generally smooth."

ii. "Very pleased to see progress being made on the interface between 'producer' and 'consumer' of archives. More feedback from museums, especially positive, would be good. There is scope for expanding the collaboration between units and museums, for example by early identification and quantification of the potential of excavations to provide

the basis for exhibitions (seconding the museum curator onto the Steering group of a long term project has made this less a problem in our home patch than elsewhere). Possibility of long-term, seasonal excavations providing a sequence of mini-exhibitions and updates."

iii. "We think that the issues of deposition of document archives are interwoven with museum deposition and should be discussed together. We hear that Museums, in general, are discontent at the standard of the archaeological assemblages deposited with them. We receive so little feedback (positive, neutral, or negative) that we struggle to know where our processes are relative to typical behaviour or standards within the industry. We are not treated like a partner in a process. We support improving standards, but only where this is evenly applied across the sector, incorporating transitional arrangements for already costed / live projects. Museums should consider that archaeological contractors are not museums, and small contractors do not have ready access to lab or specialist resources. They need to enable us to find the right materials and guides, they need to provide feedback. Where a contractor does not respond to this process then some level of enforcement (maybe on a RAG system) should be applied – i.e. reject assemblages and demand improvements."

iv. "None."

5.9 Part 2 Key Conclusions and Recommendations

5.9.1 Awareness of guidelines for archives

Guidelines created and distributed by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (in particular the 'CIfA Standard and Guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives' document which is used by 100% of respondents), Historic Environment Scotland, Museums and Galleries Scotland, and specialist reports submitted by conservators or finds experts are widely used across the sector. The

remaining guides and documents listed within the survey are known of by circa 44% of the sector, but only used by circa 27%. The gaps in knowledge are also highlighted by only 50% of respondents feeling that the guidelines they used met all their needs. Where issues arise, it appears to be around specific materials, or that guidance is not in a clear and standardised format. Where organisations have sought to address this, it has resulted in only circa 33% of the sector having in-house standards and guidelines.

A total of 58% of respondents said they received training from their respective organisations in archaeological archiving to museum standards. However, as noted by one respondent, this may not match the standards expected by museums. A variety of different roles across organisations undertake archive preparation, which reflects the variation in size of such organisations within Scotland, especially within the commercial sector.

> **Recommendation 13** – Provide access to the outcomes of Recommendation 1 above to all depositing organisations. Furthermore, training opportunities should be made available on a regular basis for those undertaking the archive preparation to be made aware of the most up-to-date standards. This could be undertaken in partnership with museums as a means of forging better partnership working.

5.9.2 Average time for processing archives

On average 42% of archaeological archives are prepared for museum deposition within two years of fieldwork being completed. Often though it can be longer than five years, with delays most regularly caused by waiting for specialist reports or for final site reports to be published.

However, it should also be noted that all of the responding organisations either have in-house expertise or access to expertise for undertaking the processing and recording of chance finds and assemblages using a variety of different techniques. Access to such resources appears to be more readily available to depositors than to the museums themselves, which reflects both

the nature of the commercial side of the sector and the greater amount of funding available to do such work prior to deposition.

> **Recommendation 14** – Review options for ensuring appropriate timescales are agreed for deposition of archives within the planning-led commercial sector, and within research work funded by the main grant giving bodies.

5.9.3 Experiences of the depositing process

Only 42% of respondents said that they had a period of liaison with the museum prior to the deposition of either chance finds or assemblages. This is not necessary seen as an issue by organisations, and yet where one respondent has regular early engagement with a museum there are obvious benefits for both parties. Whether or not an organisation has liaised with a museum, only 41% of organisations perform a check on whether the material they are about to deposit is 'museum ready'. Costs in both monetary terms and time appear to be the biggest contributors to the lack of such checks.

> **Recommendation 14** – Review options for discard of material from assemblages by depositors which does not impinge upon the legality of ownership as set out under Treasure Trove, including providing clarity of legal responsibilities for all parties.

5.9.4 Suggestions for improving the depositing process included improved communication between organisations, Treasure Trove, and museums, the creation of a single standard for deposition of archaeological assemblages that could be applied across the sector, better up-front planning of project funding so that the preparation of archives is better catered for, and quicker turnaround times by Treasure Trove.

> **Recommendation 15** – 'Before the Museum' Project reviews all suggestions and develops templates and guidelines where possible for improving the deposition process, in particular, how

communication can be improved between all involved in the process.

Recommendation 16 – Create training opportunities on either side of the deposition process to raise awareness of respective roles and procedures.

Recommendation 17 – Embed the 'museum ready' guidance produced under Recommendation 5 within the planning-led commercial sector and encourage its implementation across the remaining parts of the sector.

Three comments made within the survey neatly encapsulate many of the problems and opportunities highlighted by the organisations:

"There is scope for expanding the collaboration between units and museums, for example by early identification and quantification of the potential of excavations to provide the basis for exhibitions... Possibility of long-term, seasonal excavations providing a sequence of mini-exhibitions and updates."

"We hear that Museums, in general, are discontent at the standard of the archaeological assemblages deposited with them. We receive so little feedback (positive, neutral, or negative) that we struggle to know where our processes are relative to typical behaviour or standards within the industry. We are not treated like a partner in a process."

"There's a fundamental need to see the end point of the archaeological process as the museum accessioning process rather than as the deposition of the material with Treasure Trove - this would encourage communication and possibly even joint working where beneficial...and allow standards / processes / knowledge to become less polarised."

6.0   Acknowledgements