

## COLLECTIONS RESEARCH STRATEGY 2016-2020

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Collections research is one of the main ways by which National Museums Scotland fulfils its obligation *to preserve, interpret and make accessible for all, the past and present of Scotland, other nations and cultures and the natural world*. It ensures that public benefit is generated from the collection through the creation and dissemination of new knowledge about the objects in our collection.
- 1.2 National Museums Scotland is uniquely placed. As a museum it has both an enormous range of material collections that foster research, and the audiences that allow that research to have impact in ways beyond those available to universities and other research organisations. The museum can provide advocacy for research in partner organisations and through its public programme help them with delivering impact. Knowledge generated can be made available for all museum audiences, whether through permanent galleries and special exhibitions, national and international programming, public talks, digital resources including social media, academic conferences, or popular and research publications.
- 1.3 National Museums Scotland already conducts research to inform many of these activities. This strategy builds on the current position and sets out our ambitions for the future. It reaffirms our commitment to supporting research of the highest quality to ensure that the collection can inspire, inform and challenge our audiences now, and in the future. In order to deliver it we will need to sustain and develop expertise in a broad range of academic disciplines spanning the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences, with Scottish narratives being a particular strength. As a multidisciplinary family of museums, we are able to draw specific advantages from interdisciplinary work and perspectives.
- 1.4 The strategy sets direction on the type, scale and range of collections research carried out, commissioned or supervised by staff across National Museums Scotland. It will provide the strategic direction for Keepers, Heads of Department and individual curators to guide the production of a five-year rolling research plan. This plan will assist National Museums Scotland in allocating money staff time and other resources, and will influence the staffing needs of the Collections Directorate.
- 1.5 This strategy is closely related to our approaches to acquisition, display, public programmes, digital, publication, national and international programming, and collections care, and as such will be one of the main ways in which these activities should be more meaningfully integrated.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 To promote research of the highest quality by our own staff across the Collections Directorate and support the research of others.
- 2.2 To use research to advance the future care, interpretation, display and public engagement with the objects and specimens in the collection.
- 2.3 To unlock our collective understanding of the past and present of Scotland, other nations and cultures and the natural world.
- 2.4 To build partnerships and collaborations which will strengthen the quality and outputs of our joint research.

## 3. RESEARCH AREAS

- 3.1 Our research will fall into the three research areas below which are broadly defined and collections-centred. The Museum has a high level of expertise in a range of disciplines, identified in individual curatorial Departments and conservation and collections science. These represent the unique strengths of the institution: a focus on objects, be these art, artefacts or specimens; a focus on visitors; depth of expertise across the arts, humanities and sciences; and lastly the capacity to be multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in terms of collections research. The broad questions below and the research projects they engender utilise the distinct methodologies that arise from the varied disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, history, design studies, natural science and conservation science.
  - (i) **Looking at the making and use of objects contributes to our knowledge of human cultures and the natural world.** This area embraces questions relating to materials, makers and techniques, the interaction between peoples and the environment, changes in design and craft practice, the use of objects to define identity, status and power relationships, as well as questions of technological change.
  - (ii) **A study of the 'lives' of objects allows us to critically reappraise interpretations of human cultures and the natural world.** This area embraces questions relating to the collection and interpretation of objects and the contribution this makes to the production of knowledge, the history of museums, display practice and the virtual world.
  - (iii) **Charting changes in the natural world over time allows us to understand alterations in the natural world and human response.** This embraces questions relating to processes in Earth Systems, biological diversity, the response of the natural world to change, human and cultural factors in climate change, and questions of resilience.

#### 4. RESEARCH PRINCIPLES AND ORGANISATION

- 4.1 Interdisciplinary research groups:** There are some areas where the strength of the collection and spread of expertise means that research teams will be assembled cross-departmentally to form research and collecting hubs.
- 4.2 Quality, not quantity:** There will be an emphasis on highlighting the quality of our research programme and outputs. National Museums Scotland aims to continue to be seen as a centre of high-quality collections-based research. For example, we would want to increase the proportion of our research publications that would be recognised by external peers as central points of reference and as making a substantial contribution to their fields.
- 4.3 Research Ethics:** Our research will be guided by a Code of Research Ethics made available to staff on our Intranet. This will be regularly updated to be in line with other public sector and research organisations.
- 4.4 Partnerships:** National Museums Scotland will work closely with universities in the UK and internationally as well with other museums and other collecting and heritage organisations to conduct, support and promote collections-focussed research. Where relevant we will involve research recipients, beneficiaries and members of the public in the research process, building on best practice in this area. These partnerships will be facilitated and enabled by a Research Manager/Academic Liaison post.
- 4.5 Profile:** National Museums Scotland will raise the profile and promote the achievements of its research programme in its public communications and to appropriate stakeholders, supporters and the international research sector. Some of this activity will fall to the Research Manager/Academic Liaison post.
- 4.6 Exhibitions and Permanent galleries:** A key objective is to underpin the development of future permanent galleries and special exhibition programmes through long-term research on the objects in the collection and the history of their makers, users and collectors. Conversely, research should also come out of permanent galleries and displays.
- 4.7 Public Programme:** The research programme will feed our public events programme across all sites, and in turn the public programme will lead to academic publications and further research projects where possible. Areas of the research programme will also continue to lead primarily to academic publications.
- 4.8 Digital products:** The research programme will contribute to digital products. Throughout this document the term 'digital products' is used to indicate a wide variety of public-facing digital and broadcast activities, which may include: updating object records for access online; adding content to web pages, blogs and social media; TV programmes; online courses etc. The term is left deliberately vague as the mix and variety of products will change during the lifetime of this Strategy.

- 4.9 Career Development:** National Museums Scotland wants to ensure that staff have the appropriate skills and experience and time to develop, deliver and win funding for research and supervise high-quality research projects. This encompasses the recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled staff, the provision of training, and the proper development and management of research careers.

## 5. FUNDING

- 5.1** To deliver this strategy successfully, National Museums Scotland will need to raise adequate external funding to support the programme, with an emphasis on increasing the proportion of external funding that will contribute to salary and other core budget costs. In some cases it might be possible to 'buy' staff out of duties in order to deliver research outputs.
- 5.2** We recognise that there will be increasing competition for research funding in the coming period. National Museums Scotland has not yet established a consistent track record of growth in relation to research funding. We anticipate needing to look beyond traditional sources of funding, especially into the private sector, and prepare outstanding applications. Our own resources will need to be carefully targeted towards providing seed funding for this, and also used for essential research which will be hard to fund through other means. The Research Manager/Academic Liaison role will focus on securing these grants for the future.
- 5.3** The role of all senior curatorial staff will increasingly be focussed on raising and sustaining this research funding and the partnerships that will make this possible. They will be supported by the Research Manager/Academic Liaison post.

## 6. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

- 6.1 Integrating research with other priorities:** A significant opportunity will be the development and planning of resource, integrating this Strategy's aims with other National Museums Scotland priorities. This will require the setting of clear, realistic goals and deadlines through the planning and line-management process, and the effective monitoring of delivery.
- 6.2 External partnerships:** The aims of the strategy will only be achieved if we work closely with partners, especially universities and museums across the country, building on the MOUs we already have in place and guiding us towards which new MOUs we should be prioritising in the future. The Research Manager/Academic Liaison post will facilitate this opportunity.

- 6.3 Independent Research Organisation status:** National Museums Scotland has IRO status with two funding bodies: the Arts and Humanities Research Council (2010) and the Natural Environmental Research Council (2005). This status, which provides the opportunity of direct access to research council funding, is assessed regularly, and the need to maintain it is an ongoing priority. This will fall to the Research Manager/ Academic Liaison role.
- 6.4 Management and research:** Implementing the strategy will require skilled research and financial administration – both centrally and within research-active departments – to support the initiation and management of the research portfolio. It will also require clear leadership across National Museums Scotland for the individual objectives identified in the strategy. The Research Manager/Academic Liaison role will be our source of expertise on the continually changing financial administrative requirements of each of the research funding bodies.
- 6.5 Research students**  
Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (AHRC) and Doctoral Training Partnership (NERC) funded PhD students, and students from further sources will make a specific contribution to delivering the strategy. This makes the successful management of a National Museums Scotland research student programme of major importance. Success in a competitive environment requires continuing engagement with the research strategies of our funding consortium partners and Higher Educational Institution research collaborators. Greater attention to the choice of research topics, to supporting students in career-enhancing experiences and ensuring that student research leads to quality outcomes will be necessary to ensure that studentships make a meaningful contribution to overall research areas. With the emergence of collaborative consortia and doctoral training partnerships, the changing funding environment for research students is an area where wider research and academic partnerships can be developed and reinforced. We should also investigate the possibility of funding studentships from other sources, and of offering short-term research secondments as part of other institutions' PhDs or other research projects.
- 6.6 Space and facilities**  
Provision of analytical equipment, appropriate and flexible spaces at Chambers Street and Granton, and a range of other supporting facilities such as ITS, access to the collections, library provision etc. will be needed, either provided by National Museums Scotland or through partnership with Universities and other institutions. This will need to support team-based projects and facilitate research requiring long-term access to large quantities of collections material, and to make provision for visiting researchers and research students.

### 6.7 Digital humanities and curation

As National Museums Scotland's research increasingly uses digital methods and generates large amounts of primary digital data such as that from CT scans Geographical Information Systems and material analysis, there will be major challenges in terms of technical infrastructure and resources, staff skills, collaborative procedures and the curation of the resulting data. The approach will be to work closely with external digital humanities organisations and university departments in order to ensure that our approach is up-to-date and maximises the potential of digital methods to enhance our research activities.

### 6.8 Library and archives

Important aspects of this Strategy will depend on the efficient organisation of, and proper support for the Museum's library and archives. Sustained access to paid-for online resources, journals and e-books will be essential to the success of this Strategy. Partnership arrangements with local universities will need to be increasingly investigated.

### 6.9 Open Access

National Museums Scotland will need to find financially and technologically sustainable ways to be open-access and open-data compliant. The research repository will continue to play an important part in this requirement.

## 7. MEASURING SUCCESS

7.1 The success of this Strategy will be seen through the quality, type, range and amount of research and funding achieved. It will be primarily visible through the publications and other public outputs that result. The uniqueness of museum research means that we will not be adopting the same criteria used by the university sector for evaluating excellence and success. However, we will be mindful of the measures of research funding organisations and comply with their measures.

- (i) **Staff publications:** We aim to achieve an annual target of books, exhibition catalogues and peer-reviewed articles or papers written by current Museum staff and National Museums Scotland supported students where these are the result of National Museums Scotland projects. More is not necessarily better in this case.
- (ii) **Non-staff research on collections.** We will keep a record of research that is conducted on our collection, and resulting publications and other outputs such as raw data. This includes work by former staff.
- (iii) **External Funding:** We will have a fundraising target for research, with additional targets for the proportion of funding that will contribute to existing salary or other core costs, and potentially for exhibition costs.

- (iv) **Collaboration:** We will look at measuring the impact that collaboration with organisations beyond National Museums Scotland makes to our research and to the collaborating institutions, including student careers.
- (v) **Quality of outputs:** Although the above measures are mainly quantitative, we will also investigate qualitative measures in line with our principal to focus on quality rather than quantity. This may include areas such as: the contribution that research makes to increasing the quality of our galleries, exhibitions, public events, digital products and publications; and the contribution that it makes to improving how we conserve, document and store the collection.

## **8. IMPLEMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE**

- 8.1** Upon approval, this Strategy will be implemented through the development of a new five-year rolling research plan. This will contain current and planned research activities, projects and publications mapped against the research areas and measures of success outlined above, and against major projects and public activities in the forward plan.
- 8.2** A system will be instigated to ensure that the prioritisation, approval and monitoring of large research grants is conducted in a strategic way.
- 8.3** Each of the items in the 'Opportunities and Challenges' section of this Strategy will be allocated a champion, who will be responsible for taking forward a plan for maximising opportunities.
- 8.4** The appointment of the Research Manager/Academic Liaison role will be key to the success of winning and administering grants, and other elements of driving this Strategy forward.
- 8.5** We will establish a number of cross-departmental research groups to develop a vision, priorities and themes for the development of new research activities and partnerships. These will then feed into the five-year rolling research plan.
- 8.6** The delivery of the Strategy will be monitored by the Research Strategy Group at its biennial meetings, and by the Board of Trustees through the bimonthly Collections report.
- 8.7** The content of this Strategy will be reviewed every four years.

**Xerxes Mazda**  
**Director of Collections**  
**23 May 2016**

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT and DOCUMENT SUMMARY

<b>Document Name</b> <i>(for strategies include the duration, e.g. 2016-20 and executive summary)</i>	Collections Research Strategy 2016-2020
<b>Document Owner</b>	Name: Xerxes Mazda Job Title: Director of Collections
<b>Approval Obtained by</b>	Board of Trustees Date: 08 June 2016
<b>Document Version Number</b> <i>(If applicable)</i>	Version: 1 Last reviewed: 17/05/2016
<b>Document Next Review</b> <i>(If applicable)</i>	Due for next review: 17/05/2020

<b>Equality Impact Assessment Completion</b>	Date Completed: 17/05/2016 Completed by: Xerxes Mazda, Director of Collections
<b>Summary of Equality Impact Assessment</b>	This strategy is designed to reiterate the importance of research, as listed in our Strategic Plan (Priority 3: <i>Strengthening and sharing collections knowledge and research</i> ). The strategy stresses the necessity for research to link to public products, and the need for additional resourcing and partnership working. The equality impact of public products is covered through the Learning & Programmes Strategy and Displays strategy, and funding bodies and partners will have their own requirements in terms of equality which we will need to take account of.
<b>Equality Impact Assessment – Action Points</b>	To make research information available in alternative formats as necessary;

<b>Signed</b>	Signature of document owner: X Mazda Date: 17/05/2016
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## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### Section 1 - Background

<p><b>Does your document affect people?</b> (the communities we serve, potential employees or our staff and volunteers)</p>	No	<p>Stop here, give a brief summary of your reasoning in Section 2, sign and date the section on page 1 and send to: <b>Kellie Stratford, Organisational Development Projects Manager.</b></p>
<p><b>Does your document affect people?</b> (the communities we serve, potential employees or our staff and volunteers)</p>	Yes	Go to next question.
<p><b>Is your document relevant to the General Equality Duty?</b> (i.e. could it contribute to the advancement of equality, the elimination of discrimination or the promotion of good relations?)</p>	No	<p>Stop here, give a brief summary of your reasoning in Section 2, sign and date the section on page 1 and send this document to: <b>Kellie Stratford, Organisational Development Projects Manager</b></p>
<p><b>Does your document have relevance?</b></p>	Yes	Proceed with assessment – go to Section 3

### Section 2 – Summary of reasoning

<p><b>The document does not affect people:</b></p>	
<p><b>The document does not have relevance:</b></p>	

### Section 3 – Impact and Evidence

Protected Groups	Evidence	Potential Impact
<b>Age</b>	Older groups may obtain less information from the online environment.	Less access to information.
<b>Disability</b>	Some groups may have greater difficulty obtaining information online.	Less access to information.
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>		
<b>Pregnancy &amp; Maternity</b>		
<b>Race</b>		
<b>Religion or Belief</b>		
<b>Sex</b>		
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		

## Section 4 – Actions and Monitoring

What actions would you recommend to address the findings of the assessment at Section 3?

Proposed Actions	Person Responsible Please include all people involved.	Timescale
Monitor and review  Develop the 5-year rolling research programme, ensuring that it aligns with the needs of the organisation.	Director of Collections	2016-2020

How will you monitor the impact of this document?

The document contains six suggested measures of success.

## Section 5 – Involvement and Consultation

Who have you involved in the undertaking of this assessment?

Internal consultation.  
 Consultation with other Museum research managers and Directors of Collections.  
 Consultation with the Research Advisory Group.

If you have further involvement to carry out, please list who you are going to involve and how.

Now **sign** and **date** the section on **Page 1** and send this document to: **Kellie Stratford, Organisational Development Projects Manager.**