



Foundations for the Future

National Museums NI Collections Research Policy

2019-2024

Introduction

Research into the collections is the foundation for everything we do in museums. Through increasing knowledge and understanding about the specimens in our care we can inspire and engage audiences in a range of different ways. From defining exhibition content to informing collections development, research is essential. Research is also increasingly recognised as a vital tool for museums to move beyond being traditional repositories and to modernise their outlook and approach.

At National Museums NI (NMNI) we believe that research can help provide a better experience for visitors and improve how our museums contribute to debates about contemporary society. Whilst research has always been important at NMNI, this policy represents a new level of organisational commitment and ambition. It aims to build on past and current achievements and shift the emphasis of responsibility from the individual to the organisation.

Through the implementation of this policy we will prioritise and champion research; ensuring consistency, impact, visibility and excellence.

Research Policy Aims

- To increase the role and profile of research at NMNI
- To ensure NMNI recognises the value of research
- To improve how NMNI utilises research to inform its work
- To improve how we undertake and support research within NMNI

Research Policy Objectives

Short-term (1-5 years):

- To develop a Research Plan for NMNI
- To define a support framework for research at NMNI
- To devise an internal and external communication plan for sharing the outputs and outcomes of NMNI staff research
- To improve how research informs NMNI's annual Business Plan objectives
- To increase funding to support research
- To actively foster collaboration with external partners to instigate new research on collections

Long-term (5-10 years):

- To ensure that all research undertaken by NMNI staff has a defined outward-facing output and is shared beyond the museum
- For NMNI to be recognised with Independent Research Organisation Status (IRO) by UK Research and Innovation

1. Defining research

1.1 For the purpose of this policy we are defining research as that which is collections-based, ensuring the development, application and dissemination of new knowledge about the specimens within the national collection.

1.2 Research is undertaken both by museum staff and by external partners, particularly from academia.

2. The importance of research

2.1 Research enables us to fulfil our statutory obligations as defined under Article 4 (1) of the *Museums & Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998*:

- To care for, preserve and add to the objects in its collections
- To secure that the objects are exhibited to the public and assist the public by interpreting the significance of the objects
- To secure that the objects are available for persons seeking to inspect them in connection with study and research
- To generally promote the awareness, appreciation and understanding by the public of
 - i. Art, history and science
 - ii. The culture and way of life of people
 - iii. The migration and settlement of people

- 2.2 It is a requirement of the Museum Accreditation Standard (2014) that museums must *'provide access to the collections and associated information for research purposes and other forms of engagement'*.
- 2.3 Through research we can increase our participation on local, national and international platforms, so enhancing our professional profile and reputation.
- 2.4 Through research we can develop and reap mutual benefits from key strategic partnerships with other complementary organisations.

3. Addressing issues

- 3.1 At present, a number of issues impede NMNI's ability to effectively undertake research internally and to facilitate access to the collections by external collaborators. These will be addressed by:
 - Improving facilities for research-related activities
 - Increasing attitudinal and financial support for research within the organisation
 - Developing confidence amongst internal staff about their ability to undertake research
 - Prioritising time to undertake research
 - Providing training and developing skills for measuring the impact of research and communicating its outcomes
 - Recruiting and developing specialist staff, as budget permits and within the context of the wider organisational development plan
- 3.2 NMNI has already recruited a dedicated Research Coordinator. The role of this individual is to support staff efforts to undertake research where help or assistance is required. This individual also acts as a point of contact for external researchers that wish to undertake research on the collections.
- 3.3 NMNI further commits to address these issues through the delivery of its Corporate Plan 2016-2021 and its annual Business Plans.

4. Supporting research within the organisation

- 4.1 NMNI recognises that funding is often required to initiate or facilitate research. Therefore, NMNI will provide primer funding to staff via its Foundations for the Future scheme.
- 4.2 To increase the amount of money available for the Foundations for the Future scheme NMNI will incorporate research time into overheads when making funding applications.
- 4.3 NMNI will also provide support to staff seeking external funding for research projects. NMNI will encourage such funding applications to cover staff time and project costs.

- 4.4 All curators will be encouraged to undertake research via the inclusion of research goals/targets in annual work plans.
- 4.5 Internally and via external collaborators NMNI will seek to support the development of skills that will enable staff to better undertake research and communicate its outcomes and impact.
- 4.6 NMNI will explore ways to improve the facilities for internal and external researchers across all sites.
- 4.7 NMNI will prioritise access to collections for research purposes when undertaking capital projects and master-planning activities.

5. Working with external partners

- 5.1 In the short-term NMNI will establish collaborative arrangements with local universities in Northern Ireland. These arrangements will enable NMNI's ambitions to increase research on our collections and will be a particular priority for areas of the collections where we no longer have curatorial expertise.
- 5.2 NMNI will support research with external collaborators by providing opportunities for undergraduate and post-graduate students to work on the collections.
- 5.3 NMNI will provide support for post-doctoral research on the collections.
- 5.4 In the longer-term NMNI will pursue establishing collaborative arrangements with other higher education institutions in the United Kingdom and on the island of Ireland.
- 5.5 NMNI will increase the visibility of the national collections to external researchers. NMNI will do so via its own digitisation and interpretation activities and through partnerships with external organisations.
- 5.6 NMNI will develop Memorandums of Understanding with special interest groups who can help support and inform research into the collections.
- 5.7 NMNI will advertise that the Research Coordinator is the single point of contact for all research enquiries.

6 Communicating research outputs

- 6.1 NMNI will communicate that the organisation is committed to research on the collections by NMNI staff and external collaborators.
- 6.2 NMNI will communicate outputs from research via traditional means including, publications, exhibitions and other programming and will explore opportunities presented by new media and technologies.
- 6.3 NMNI will commit to the sharing of research outputs within the organisation, to increase wider staff knowledge and understanding of the collections and ultimately improve the visitor experience.
- 6.4 NMNI will encourage staff to publish results of their research in appropriate outlets. This will include supporting publication in peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations and touring exhibitions. This will result in greater reach for NMNI research and improve the professional standing of NMNI staff.
- 6.5 To ensure that knowledge about the collections is available to a wide audience, NMNI will ensure all research outputs, where possible, are open access.

7. Prioritising research

- 7.1 NMNI's priority shall be the collections and associated subject areas defined under Article 4 (1) of the *Museums & Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998* and detailed in NMNI's Collection Development Policy 2018-2023.
- 7.2 As the national collection develops over time, research may expand to incorporate additional areas.
- 7.3 NMNI will prioritise staff to undertake research which supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2016-2021 and the annual Business Plans. Research will therefore be aligned to the following objectives:
 - To look after and add to our collections
 - To create more engaging visitor experiences
 - To connect with more people
 - Open up and share our spaces
 - Build museum services of the future
- 7.4 NMNI will support research with external collaborators on the collections but will prioritise research on the following:
 - activities associated with the delivery of the Corporate Plan 2016-2021 and annual Business Plans
 - areas of the collection without existing curatorial expertise
 - activities that will contribute to the enhancement of the visitor experience

8. Measuring success

- 8.1 NMNI will monitor and record the type and number of outputs generated by staff on a quarterly basis.
- 8.2 NMNI will monitor and record the type and number of outputs from external collaborators and require submission of findings at the end of a project.
- 8.3 For research with a public-facing output NMNI will measure success through data and information such as visitor numbers, visitor feedback, press coverage and peer reviews.
- 8.4 NMNI will develop an accessible repository for research outputs from work on the collections.
- 8.5 NMNI will measure and record external funding received for research activities and seek to increase this funding.
- 8.6 NMNI will explore how to deliver and measure economic, social and cultural impact from our work.

9. Research ethics

- 9.1 There is evidence of high levels of public trust in museums and we must repay that trust by ensuring that research conducted by NMNI staff and research facilitated by NMNI adheres to ethical best practice.
- 9.2 Our research activities will be guided by the following ethical codes:
 - UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, ratified Nov 2002
 - CITES – ‘Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora’ 1973/79
 - Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions, National Museum Directors Conference 1998
 - Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on collecting and borrowing Cultural Material, DCMS 2005
 - Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, DCMS 2005
 - Code of Ethics for Museums, Museums Association 2015
 - UK Export Licensing for Cultural Goods – Procedures and guidance for exporters of works of art and other culture goods, Arts Council England 2011
 - ICOM code of Ethics for Museums 2013 (including the ICOM ‘Red List’)
- 9.3 It will be a requirement that all external collaborators who work on the collections will adhere to these ethical codes.

10. Policy implementation

10.1 The following NMNI strategies, plans and procedures, in particular, are relevant to the Research Policy:

- Collections Care and Conservation Plan 2018
- Collections Information and Access Policy 2018
- Collections Development Policy 2018
- Digitisation Strategy 2010
- Digitisation Preservation Strategy 2011
- Documentation Plan 2007
- Documentation Plan (Revised) 2014
- Documentation and Loans Procedural Manuals 2010
- Estates Strategy 2018
- Energy Management Policy 2014
- Environmental Sustainability Policy 2018
- Exhibition Policy 2019
- Intellectual Rights Policy 2013
- ICT Strategy 2012-2015 ICT Strategy 2016-2020
- Integrated Pest Management Policy 2014
- Lending and Borrowing Policy 2017
- Major Incident and Emergency Plan 2018
- Working Collections Policy 2014

10.2 Upon approval, the Research Policy will be implemented through a five-year research plan, aligned with organisational priorities.

10.3 Training, where relevant, will be provided to support the delivery of the Research Policy.

10.4 All research activity will be managed, monitored and reported on by the Research Coordinator.

10.5 The delivery of this policy will be monitored at a strategic level by the Senior Management Team.

10.6 All NMNI staff should strive to meet the responsibilities outlined within the Research Policy.