

Draft Corporate Strategy

2025–2030



**Ulster
Museum**

**Ulster
Folk
Museum**

**Ulster
Transport
Museum**

**Ulster
American
Folk Park**



National Museums NI is custodian of a rich and varied collection that tells the story of this place, its people and our place in the world.

Our role is to work with the public to explore and share stories about real objects in each of our museums that helps all of us to gain new knowledge and understanding.

Our museums are best known as much loved visitor attractions for those who want to enjoy time out with family and friends or learn something new – welcoming both those who live here and tourists who visit. However the impact of our work extends well beyond that. This Strategy will focus on the difference we can make in helping to understand and deal with the challenges we face in society today, as we shape a better future together.



While our museums have a long-standing reputation for providing education and recreation, to stay relevant and impactful in a fast-changing world, we must continue to evolve our approach.

Today, museums are much more than spaces for displaying objects - they are key players in addressing the pressing issues of our time. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) redefined the museum's role in 2022, stating that museums are “permanent institutions in the service of society” that foster diversity, sustainability and inclusivity whilst offering learning, reflection and enjoyment. This shift reflects the growing recognition that museums can be powerful forces for change, especially in tackling societal challenges.

This is particularly important in the context of National Museums NI's role as an Arms Length Body (ALB) of the Department for Communities. It is not just our mission, but our responsibility, to ensure that our museums deliver strong public value and make a significant contribution towards key departmental strategies and wider governmental plans and policies.

We will continue to do this by committing to three core principles which will underpin our strategic approach and permeate everything we do:

Ensuring museums are for everyone

While our museums welcome all, we recognise that barriers still exist for many – whether physical, cultural or attitudinal.

To overcome these barriers, we are committed to promoting equality of access and participation, creating spaces that reflect the diversity of Northern Ireland's population. **Inclusion isn't just a goal; it's a fundamental part of who we are and what we do.**

We will work to ensure that diverse voices are heard and multiple perspectives are represented in our exhibitions, programming and operations. We aim to make our museums places where people feel connected to the stories they see, so that they can find relevance in our heritage and culture.

By partnering with local communities and underrepresented voices, we will continue to build museums that belong to everyone.



Connecting our collections with people

Our collections are more than static displays. They are constantly developing repositories of lived experiences, diverse cultures and complex histories that can help us navigate today's world and our understanding of both local and global challenges – from identity and conflict to environmental sustainability.

This will require a continued shift toward participatory practice: working with communities, researchers and creative partners to shape how we collect, interpret and share these stories.

People should not just visit museums, they should be part of them – helping to inform research, co-create exhibits and contribute to the narratives we create. This approach will present fresh, relevant perspectives and ensures resonance with contemporary audiences. Through international collaborations and local partnerships, we will enhance our impact by connecting our unique heritage with global narratives.

Delivering a future-focused, effective museums service

In a time of constrained public sector budgets, we are committed to delivering the greatest public value by ensuring our museums are both financially sustainable and sharply focused.

To achieve this, we must continually find innovative ways to enhance services while maximising efficiency with the resources available.

We will also seek essential investment in the heritage assets we manage, ensuring their preservation for future generations through preventive maintenance, conservation, development and adaptive approaches to meet the evolving needs of our audiences.

Collaboration will also continue to be critical. Building new partnerships will allow us to share expertise, pool resources and reach broader audiences.

Our Mission

We're on a mission to amplify the impact of our museums and collections, using them to spark conversation, provoke action and tackle today's biggest challenges.

At our core, we see our museums not just as custodians of history, but as catalysts for positive change. We believe that they are at their best when using their knowledge of the past to pose questions about the present and help shape a better future.

In a world characterised by rapid change and complexity, our museums can offer a powerful reminder of our shared humanity and our responsibilities to each other and the planet. Rather than having a passive role, we want our museums to continue to be dynamic forums for dialogue and new ideas, where visitors are encouraged to explore, question and gain a fresh understanding about the world around them.

Our Corporate Strategy 2020-25 has laid a solid foundation for this mission. We have developed new programmes that address a broad spectrum of societal issues and expanded opportunities for engagement through new partnerships, increased volunteering and reimagined education programmes.

With our new Strategy, we want to extend this impact even further as a bold voice for positive change, action and conversations that drive progress.

We will make our greatest impact in four key areas, aligned to the missions within the Programme for Government.

Programme for Government mission:

Our work supports:

We will focus our impact on:

People



- Social inclusion
- Mental health & wellbeing
- Community cohesion

Identity

We will champion diverse and ever-evolving identities, creating spaces where different cultures are visible and respected.

Peace



- Good relations
- Community cohesion
- Equality

Peacebuilding

We will encourage courageous conversations that support the ongoing journey from conflict to lasting peace.

Planet



- Climate action
- Environmental education

Environment

We will mobilise our museums and collections to promote environmental action and protect our shared planet.

Prosperity



- Skills development
- Employability
- Regional balance through tourism

Innovation

We will be a learning platform to equip a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs with skills, confidence and creativity.



Identity:
We will champion
diverse and
ever-evolving
identities,
creating spaces
where cultures
are visible
and respected.



Why this is important

The concept of identity is complex. Our society is becoming ever more diverse, but we live in a place where tradition matters. Within this weave of diversity, everyone should feel valued and have a strong sense of belonging.

For some, identity is rooted in cultural and historical narratives passed down through generations, while others are defining themselves in a more globalised and changing world.

Northern Ireland's political landscape continues to highlight the significance of identity. Frameworks such as *New Decade, New Approach (2020)* and the *Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022* place emphasis on reconciliation, tolerance and respect.

These shifts are not just about language and symbols; they are about building an inclusive society where every individual, regardless of background or belief, feels respected.

How we are making an impact



As Northern Ireland navigates this period of change, we believe our museums are more important than ever.

In a place where identity is deeply personal yet politically significant museums connect the past with the present, offering glimpses of a shared future.

By facilitating a better understanding of the complex and evolving nature of identity, we are using our spaces and collections to create opportunities for reflection, dialogue and creative engagement.

We want to contribute to a future where mutual respect thrives and help build a more inclusive and empathetic society.

Our Impact in Action:



Inclusive Global Histories

Through our approach to *Inclusive Global Histories* we have begun to develop a more inclusive, collaborative way to understanding cultures, locally and globally.

We have carefully re-examined collections through the lens of equality and diversity, giving a voice to marginalised communities and underrepresented histories.

We are challenging conventional narratives and bringing to the fore stories of imperialism, migration and the legacies of colonialism.

We have highlighted the experience of people from different cultures and communities in contemporary society. Visitors are encouraged to understand not only the challenges they have faced, and continue to face, but also the positive contribution we can all make to our society.

[Click here to find out more about our Inclusive Global Histories work.](#)

Languages of Ulster

Our Languages of Ulster programme delves into our linguistic diversity, celebrating the rich tapestry of our indigenous languages – Irish, Ulster Scots and Hiberno-English.

By showcasing the role language plays in identity, culture and heritage, this initiative has demonstrated how our museums – notably the Ulster Folk Museum – can address such topics in an accessible and engaging way, stimulating new discussion and debate.

Through interpretive trails, workshops and special events, we have encouraged conversations about the role of language in shaping our sense of self and community.

[Find out more about our Languages of Ulster programme here.](#)

How we will amplify our impact

We will focus on creating opportunities to share experiences and to listen and learn from each other.

We will continue to explore the intersections of culture, identity and history; to stimulate dialogue, challenge assumptions and celebrate diversity.

We aim to play an active role in shaping a more inclusive understanding of contemporary identities for everyone.

As part of our strategic approach in the next five years, we will:

- Promote positive dialogue around identity.
- Champion diversity and inclusion in everything we do.
- Actively work to decolonise our museums and collections.
- Support bolder conversations about our shared future.





Peacebuilding:
We will encourage
courageous
conversations
that support
the ongoing
journey from
conflict to
lasting peace.

Why this is important

Over twenty-five years have passed since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and whilst great progress has been made, peacebuilding and reconciliation remains a fundamental priority now and into the future.

'The Troubles' is a complex story with many conflicting perspectives. The legacy of the conflict continues to affect individuals, families and communities, each with their own memories and interpretations.

While the Agreement brought peace, it did not erase the divisions or the emotional, psychological and societal effects of the conflict.

This history is still very much alive today, impacting everything from politics to community relations, education and identity.

How we are making an impact



‘The Troubles’ may be a chapter in our history, but its legacy lives on. Our role is to ensure that this story is told in its full complexity, with respect for the diverse experiences and perspectives that define it. It requires on-going exploration and research.

Key to this will be our ability to gather oral histories and connect them to our collection through new approaches to interpretation.

In a society still defined by opposing allegiances, our museums can create opportunities for dialogue, promote shared understanding and encourage visitors to think critically about the legacy of this period.

Through the power of storytelling, we are helping build empathy and understanding across divides.

Our Impact in Action:



The Troubles and Beyond

The Troubles and Beyond exhibition at the Ulster Museum was launched in 2018 to provide a comprehensive exploration of this complex period of our history.

As a dynamic gallery it goes beyond the conflict itself, addressing the broader social, economic and cultural shifts in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the present. It features diverse objects that reveal the multifaceted experiences of individuals and communities during this time. By weaving new research insights with personal memories, it captures how ordinary life continued in the midst of political unrest.

The collection is continuously evolving, shaped by public feedback and engagement, ensuring it remains a relevant and reflective resource for all visitors. Its core aim is to promote understanding, healing and reconciliation in Northern Ireland as it charts a path from conflict to peace.

[Explore the The Troubles and Beyond digital exhibition here.](#)

Conflict Legacy Interpretive Network

The Conflict Legacy Interpretive Network was established by National Museums NI, the Museum of Free Derry/Bloody Sunday Trust and Healing Through Remembering.

It aims to address the ongoing impact of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland by fostering collaboration between organisations committed to preserving and interpreting conflict-related histories.

National Museums NI plays a central role in this initiative by leveraging our expertise in curating sensitive narratives.

Through this network, museums and organisations work together to offer educational programmes, exhibitions and public dialogue, providing spaces for reflection and healing.

By building this partnership, National Museums NI ensures that the legacy of 'The Troubles' is thoughtfully and responsibly conveyed to future generations, while promoting understanding and reconciliation.

How we will amplify our impact

Our work on conflict and its legacy and commitment to peace will remain central to our mission.

By embracing our role as facilitators of understanding and reconciliation, we can help shape a Northern Ireland that remembers the past but looks toward a more peaceful and inclusive future.

As part of our strategic approach in the next five years, we will:

- Be confident and courageous in our work and the approaches we have developed.
- Respect the fact that everyone has the truth of their own lived experience.
- Deepen our engagement locally and broaden our engagement internationally.
- Ensure that more voices can be heard, respectfully and with empathy.





Environment:

We will mobilise our museums and collections to promote environmental action and protect our shared planet.

Why this is important

The environmental crisis is one of the most urgent challenges of our time. It is not just a political or scientific issue - it is a threat to life on Earth.

The impact of environmental degradation is felt worldwide, but it also has direct consequences for Northern Ireland's landscapes, wildlife and communities.

The effects of climate change are already visible in changing weather patterns, rising sea levels and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events. In addition, the loss of plant and animal species, the spread of invasive species and the accumulation of pollutants are posing significant risks to our local environment.

While these challenges are immense, we also live in a place of natural beauty, rich biodiversity and valuable ecosystems. From our coastlines to our forests, from our rivers to our rolling hills, the natural world plays a vital role in shaping our identity and supporting wellbeing.

Protecting and sustaining this natural heritage is not just an environmental responsibility — it is a cultural one.

How we are making an impact



The environmental crisis demands urgent action and our museums are part of the solution.

By using our collections, sites and scientific expertise and by engaging communities, our museums can be catalysts for environmental action.

We engage visitors of all ages in activities and conversations about the environment and what they can do to protect it.

We are highlighting both the threats to the planet and the innovative solutions being developed to address them.

We are collaborating with environmental organisations, schools and communities to create programmes that promote sustainable living and challenge people to make positive changes in their own lives.

Our Impact in Action:



Environmental Volunteering

The Ulster Folk Museum has introduced an environmental volunteering programme that connects the community with the natural world in partnership with The Conservation Volunteers.

People of all ages can now volunteer to participate in hands-on projects such as hedge-laying, traditional gardening and habitat creation across the museum's expansive site.

These efforts aim to restore biodiversity and protect native wildlife, enhancing the museum's landscape for future generations. In addition to gaining practical conservation skills, volunteers play a vital role in maintaining the museum's authenticity by preserving historical practices in sustainable living.

[Click here to watch a short video on environmental volunteering.](#)

DiSSCo UK

The Distributed System of Scientific Collections UK (DiSSCo UK) is working to harness the full potential of the UK's natural science collections by making them physically and digitally open, accessible and usable for all forms of research and innovation.

A £155 million investment by UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) in the programme will be used to support digitisation across the UK's vast natural science collections, including those held by National Museums NI.

Our Natural Sciences collection is an invaluable resource which serves as a window into the fauna and flora as it occurred in the past and up to the present, documenting the remarkable diversity of species and ecosystems. This includes geological and palaeontological collections, reflecting deep time changes in our Earth's history. We are working to unlock the immense potential of this collection and harness the associated information, reflecting the historic species diversity represented by our specimens. This contributes to understanding environmental change and fosters a deeper appreciation for biodiversity.

Working with the UK collections community, DiSSCo UK will unlock and catalyse the full scientific, research and economic value of natural science collections. The UK's collections are among the world's most geographically, historically and taxonomically important and the uses and values of collections like these are unparalleled; from tracking biodiversity loss to informing policy and finding cures for diseases.

How we will amplify our impact

Protecting the natural world is as important as preserving our cultural heritage. We will accelerate our efforts to highlight the history of the natural world and the impact of human activity on ecosystems. We can help visitors understand the scale of the crisis and the urgency of protecting our planet.

Informed by our leading research and partnerships with environmental organisations, we will aim to raise awareness and drive positive change.

As part of our strategic approach in the next five years, we will:

- Enshrine sustainable practice throughout the organisation's activities and the management of our resources.
- Champion a more sustainable way of living and working.
- Introduce more sustainable collections management.
- Increase biodiversity in our green spaces.



Innovation: We will be a learning platform to equip a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs with skills, confidence and creativity.



Why this is important

Innovation is the engine that drives societal progress and economic prosperity. It offers solutions to complex global challenges, from climate change to public health crises. In today's rapidly changing world, marked by the digital revolution and technological advancements, the ability to think creatively, solve problems and adapt to new realities is more critical than ever.

Innovation not only shapes the future of industries but also addresses societal inequalities, improves quality of life and ensures sustainable development.

By developing skills in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), individuals are better equipped to contribute to economic growth and adapt to the demands of the modern workforce.

Museums play a unique role in nurturing this spirit of innovation. They can be powerful catalysts for education, skill development, lifelong learning and creative thinking – building confidence and unlocking potential in individuals and communities alike.

By providing hands-on learning experiences visitors can make connections between the innovations of the past and the challenges of today.

How we are making an impact



Our museums are places that can ignite curiosity and creativity and build essential skills. Our schools' programmes, developed in collaboration with educational partners, bring history, science and art to life.

These experiences encourage young people to think critically, work collaboratively and explore new career pathways in heritage, technology and the creative industries.

We also offer apprenticeships, internships and work placements that provide valuable real-world experience and help bridge the gap between education and employment.

Additionally, our volunteering programmes engage people of all ages, offering them the chance to develop new skills, gain confidence and contribute to their communities. By offering these diverse learning opportunities, our museums serve as engines of innovation and skill-building.

Our Impact in Action:



Museum of Innovation

The Museum of Innovation is a gallery experience located at the Ulster Transport Museum which celebrates our rich legacy of innovation in industry and technology.

This interactive space explores the region's world-leading contributions to sectors such as aerospace, transport and engineering, showcasing the creativity and ingenuity of our people.

From the birth of aviation with Short Brothers to cutting-edge technologies developed by local companies today, the gallery highlights pivotal innovations that have changed the world.

The gallery aims to inspire the next generation of inventors and engineers, particularly by promoting STEAM education. It seeks to make visitors proud of our industrial heritage while equipping them with the knowledge and skills to shape the future.

STEAM Studio

The STEAM Studio at the Ulster Museum, launched in partnership with Liberty IT, offers an exciting new space dedicated to nurturing creativity and critical thinking in young people through interactive workshops and activities.

Designed to spark curiosity and enhance problem-solving skills, participants can engage in active learning experiences, such as robotics, coding and digital design, all while exploring their artistic creativity.

The collaboration with Liberty IT enhances the STEAM Studio's reach by providing expertise in cutting-edge technology and software development. Together, we aim to equip the next generation with the skills and confidence needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving, knowledge-based economy.

By breaking down barriers between the arts and sciences, the studio demonstrates how interdisciplinary thinking can drive better innovation.

[Click here to watch a short video from Liberty IT on the STEAM studio.](#)

How we will amplify our impact

We will focus on expanding and deepening our role in driving economic and social prosperity through innovation education. We will build on our existing programmes by creating even more opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development.

Partnerships will be key and we will collaborate with schools, universities, businesses and local communities to create programmes that meet the needs of learners and employers alike.

By providing access to real-world applications of STEAM subjects, we can spark the imaginations of young learners and help build a workforce equipped to tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

As part of our strategic approach in the next five years, we will:

- Enhance our focus on innovation by curating and interpreting collections that showcase achievements in STEAM fields, celebrating innovations from the past, present and into the future.
- Expand volunteering, apprenticeship and work placement programmes to encourage skills development opportunities that empower participants and provide paths to employment.
- Advance our formal education offerings by deepening and broadening programmes aligned with STEAM subjects, inspiring learners of all ages and supporting their career readiness.

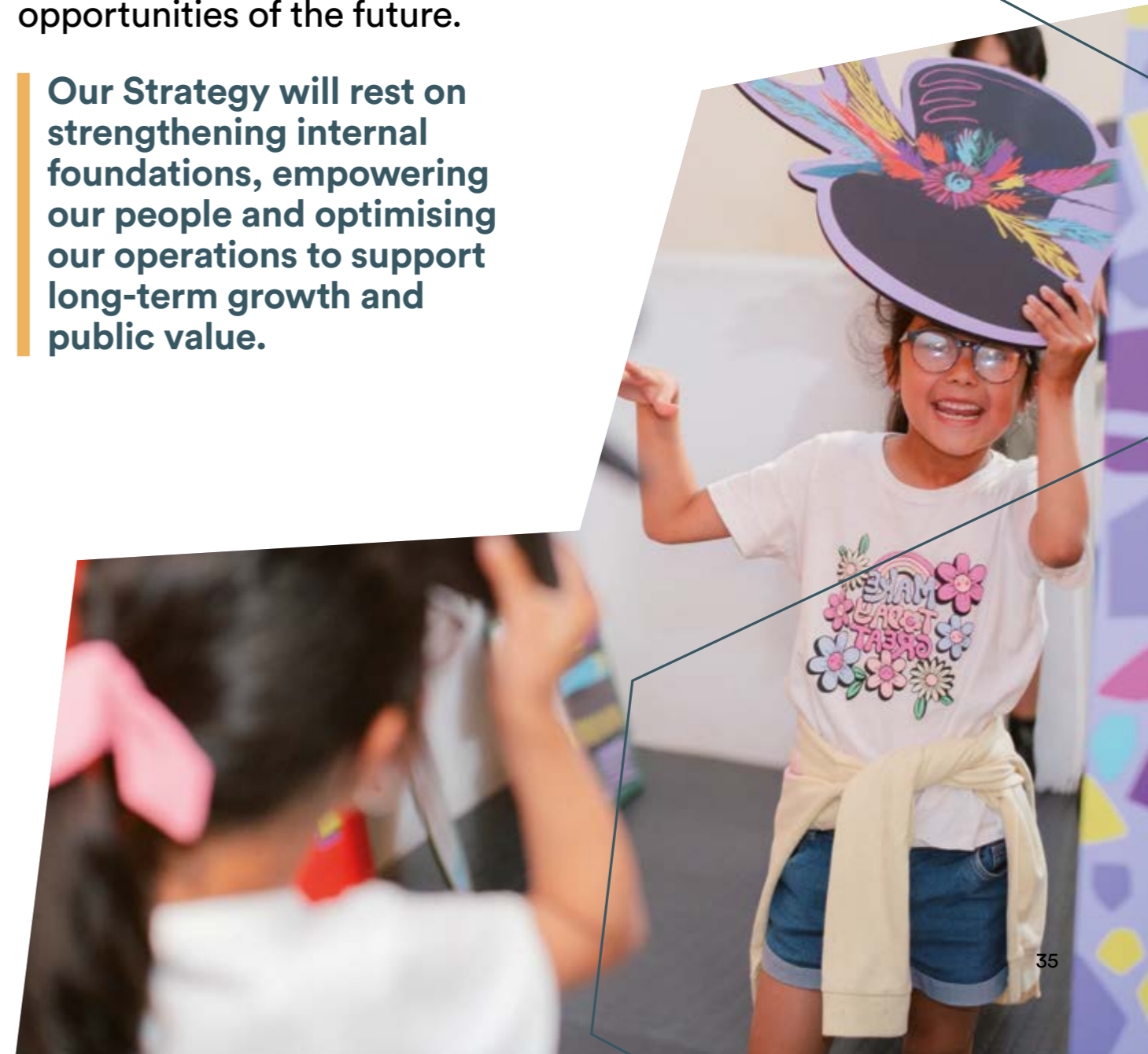


Strategic enablers:

- Our people
- Our infrastructure
- Financial resilience
- Governance

To ensure our museums continue to evolve and deliver impact, we must focus on building a resilient and agile organisation, capable of adapting to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Our Strategy will rest on strengthening internal foundations, empowering our people and optimising our operations to support long-term growth and public value.



Our people

Our people are the driving force behind our success. Their expertise, passion and commitment shape the work we do every day.

We will define a culture of collaboration, creativity and openness to new ideas that encourages ownership of projects and pushes boundaries.

Developing leadership skills across all levels will be key to underpinning a culture of empowerment and excellence, while building resilient teams that can navigate change and drive progress.

Diversity and inclusion will be central to this - ensuring our workforce reflects the communities we serve, and that a wide range of perspectives informs our decision-making. In turn, this will enable us to deliver more relevant, innovative and impactful services.

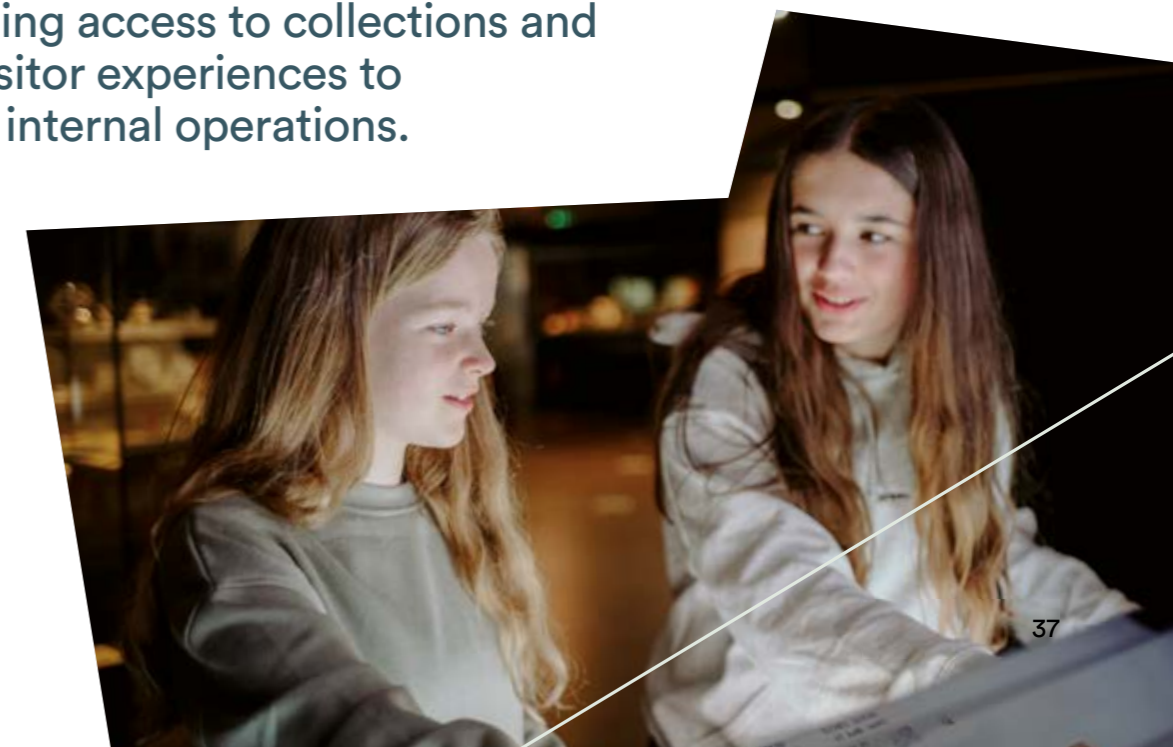
We will cultivate a forward-thinking workforce, capable of delivering our vision with confidence and purpose.

Our infrastructure

Our museum service spans five sites comprising four museums, our collections stores and a range of ancillary buildings. Together they constitute an extensive, complex estate of over 100 buildings. Maintaining and improving this infrastructure is vital as it underpins everything we do.

We will continue to make the case for investment in our infrastructure, both for ongoing essential maintenance and for the strategic, transformational development of new facilities that ensure our museums remain relevant and sustainable for future generations.

Digital innovation is also key to future-proofing our infrastructure. We will continue to identify high-impact opportunities for digital investment, from enhancing access to collections and improving visitor experiences to streamlining internal operations.



Financial resilience

Financial resilience is critical to the success of our long-term strategy.

In an era of reduced public sector funding, it is essential that we explore new income streams and optimise the commercial potential of our museums.

These efforts will be balanced with a commitment to financial transparency and sound resource management, ensuring that every pound is spent effectively to maximise public value.

By building a robust financial foundation, we will ensure that our organisation is well-equipped to invest in the future and continue delivering services that benefit communities for years to come.



Governance

Good governance is the cornerstone of organisational success. We will continue to build on our reputation for strong governance and ethical leadership, ensuring that our decision-making is transparent, accountable and aligned with public sector standards.

We will cultivate a culture of shared responsibility, where everyone at every level feels empowered to contribute to the organisation's success.

By setting clear goals and maintaining rigorous oversight, we will ensure that we remain a trusted, high-performing public body that delivers measurable results for the communities we serve.





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