NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI
RESEARCH POLICY 2025-2028

Contents

1. Introduction

Research at National Museums NI is integral to our mission, vision, and responsibilities as a Northern Ireland Government Sponsored Body (Department for Communities) and a registered charity under the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. As the national museums for Northern Ireland, we are legally mandated by the Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to deliver access to collections, education, training, guidance, and research that enriches public knowledge and engagement.

Purpose and Vision

Our vision to is to **'celebrate who we are; telling the stories of our past, challenging our present and shaping our future'**. This vision is delivered with a focus on four key impact areas (aligned to the Programme for Government): **Identity (People), Peacebuilding (Peace), Environment (Planet), and Innovation (Prosperity).** Research is the foundation of this vision, shaping our collections, exhibitions, and public engagement initiatives.

Research at National Museums NI is central to expanding knowledge about the objects and specimens in our care, enhancing audience engagement, and modernising our role as a museums in the 21st century. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and embracing innovation, we aim to address contemporary societal challenges, promote inclusivity, and contribute meaningfully to local and global conversations.

As a multi-disciplinary institution, our expertise spans the arts, humanities, and sciences. We conduct research in a variety of fields, including museology, archaeology, history, natural sciences, and community engagement. Our strategic approach focuses on cultivating a research culture that is collaborative, innovative, and sustainable, ensuring that our work supports both our institutional mission and wider societal needs.

Collaboration is at the heart of our research approach. We actively engage with academic and cultural institutions across Northern Ireland, the UK, Ireland, and internationally. These partnerships enhance our contributions in key areas such as contested heritage, the legacy of conflict, migration, and environmental sustainability. Through these collaborations, we aim to produce high-impact research that influences both policy and public discourse.

By 2026, we aim to achieve **Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status**, further positioning National Museums NI as a leader in research excellence. This policy outlines the framework for achieving this goal and subsequent optimal delivery as an IRO, and details the priority research themes that will guide our work over the next three years.

2. Strategic Context

Regulatory context

Research is central to fulfilling our statutory obligations as outlined in **Article 4(1) of the Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998**. These obligations are:

- 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

In accordance with the **Museum Accreditation Standard (2018)**, National Museums NI must demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting and facilitating research. Our dedication to advancing research strengthens our case for recognition as an **Independent Research Organisation (IRO)** and enhances our standing within national and international academic and cultural networks. Through research, we build our professional reputation and cultivate strategic partnerships that yield mutual benefits.

Ethical framework and research governance

National Museums NI conducts research in alignment with the requirements of key funding bodies, including the **National Lottery Heritage Fund, Art Fund, Museums Association, Irish Museums Association, and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)**. We adhere to the highest standards of research integrity, subscribing to the **ALLEA European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017)** and other sector-specific ethical frameworks (see Appendix B). Our commitment to ethical research practices is detailed further in Appendix A, ensuring that all research activities are conducted with transparency, accountability, and scholarly rigor

Museums sector context

The museum and heritage sector is continuously evolving in response to global challenges. Priorities such as **Decolonisation** and the **Environmental Emergency** are influencing research agendas across the sector. National Museums NI is committed to advancing research that critically examines the colonial histories represented in our collections while also contributing to efforts in biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

Our continued exploration of the **Northern Ireland conflict, known as 'The Troubles,'** plays a key role in fostering dialogue and broadening understanding of its lasting impact. By providing insights into the conflict and its legacy at both local and international levels, our research supports critical re-evaluation and historical reflection.

Organisational context

Research is at the core of our institutional purpose, underpinning every aspect of museum practice. It informs curation, conservation, and interpretation, ensuring that our museums remain responsive to contemporary issues. By expanding knowledge about the objects, specimens, and stories we hold, we create deeper and more engaging experiences for our audiences.

This policy continues to build on momentum generated by a renewed organisational commitment to and emphasis on research, as commenced in 2018. While research has long been a key function at National Museums NI, we are now embedding it more fully within our

institutional framework. By shifting from individual-led initiatives to a structured organisational approach, we are enhancing research visibility, impact, and excellence across all museum activities.

Research also enables us to effectively communicate with academic communities, policymakers, and the public. It positions us as a key contributor to national and international conversations on culture, heritage, environmental sustainability, and social justice. By prioritising and championing research across all aspects of our work, we ensure that National Museums NI continues to be a **leader in knowledge generation, cultural discourse, and public engagement.**

National Museums NI's Corporate Strategy 2025-2030 sets out four priorities, which will guide and be enabled by our research:

1- **Identity – We will champion diverse and ever-evolving identities, creating spaces where different cultures are visible and respected.**
   a. Promote positive dialogue around identity.
   b. Champion diversity and inclusion in everything we do.
   c. Actively work to decolonise our museums and collections.
   d. Support bolder conversations about our shared future.
2- **Peacebuilding – We will encourage courageous conversations that support the ongoing journey from conflict to lasting peace.**
   a. Be confident and courageous in our work and the approaches we have developed.
   b. Respect the fact that everyone has the truth of their own lived experience.
   c. Deepen our engagement locally and broaden our engagement internationally.
   d. Ensure that more voices can be heard, respectfully and with empathy.
3- **Environment – We will mobilise our museums and collections to provoke environmental action and protect our shared planet.**
   a. Use our natural Sciences collections, sites and expertise to amplify awareness of and inform responses to the environmental crisis.
   b. Champion a more sustainable way of living and working through our policies, research, data collection, collections development, exhibitions and programming.
   c. Enshrine sustainable practice throughout the organisation's activities and the management of our resources.
4- **Innovation – We will be a learning platform to equip a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs with skills, confidence and creativity.**
   a. Curate and interpret relevant collections that showcase and celebrate innovations from the past and the present.
   b. Expand volunteering, apprenticeship and work placement programmes to encourage skills development.
   c. Deepen and broaden formal education programmes aligned with STEAM subjects, inspiring learners of all ages.
   d. Strengthen research initiatives by fostering collaborations with academic, community, and industry partners.

3. Research

Definition of Research and Recognised Research Activities and Outputs

The Frascati Manual[1] definition of research states that 'Research and experimental development (R&D) comprise creative and systematic work undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge – including knowledge of humankind, culture and society – and to devise new applications of available knowledge.' To qualify as R&D, an activity must satisfy five core criteria:

1. Novel
2. Creative
3. Uncertain
4. Systematic
5. Transferrable and/or reproducible

The term R&D covers three types of activity:

- Basic research -- experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any particular application or use in view
- Applied research -- original investigation undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge. It is, however, directed primarily towards a specific, practical aim or objective.
- Experimental development -- systematic work, drawing on knowledge gained from research and practical experience and producing additional knowledge, which is directed to producing new products or processes or to improving existing products or processes.

National Museums NI takes a multi-disciplinary approach to research, ensuring high-quality, collaborative, and impactful outcomes. Research at our institution is forward-looking, addressing long-term challenges and informing strategic direction. Our research outputs take various forms, including publications, oral presentations, exhibitions, and public programming, enabling broad engagement with diverse audiences.

All research activities must align with our institutional objectives and undergo rigorous evaluation before commitment. A Research Ethics Group will be established to assess proposed research to ensure alignment with strategic priorities and resource feasibility.

Our research is designed to be **strategically aligned**, **inclusive**, **collaborative**, and **sustainable**. It is guided by our key priority themes, ensuring coherence across our initiatives. We place public benefit at the core of our work, ensuring that our research is accessible and relevant to diverse audiences. By fostering cross-sector partnerships, we create collaborative opportunities that enrich both the museum sector and wider academic discourse. Additionally, we invest in long-term expertise development to maintain the sustainability of our research, supporting the continued growth of both our organisation and the field at large.

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[1] OECD (2015), *Frascati Manual 2015: Guidelines for Collecting and Reporting Data on Research and Experimental Development*, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264239012-en.

Research Approval Process

The approval process for research proposals at National Museums NI is designed to ensure alignment with strategic priorities, resource feasibility, and institutional commitments. Researchers are encouraged to consult the Research Manager at least 6–10 weeks before submitting a proposal.

- External Researchers (academic and/or independent scholars) seeking to partner with National Museums NI on a research project should contact the Research Manager 6-8 weeks before the funding application deadline. Proposals must receive endorsement from the relevant **Head of Department or Director**. The **Research Ethics and Integrity Checklist** is also required before commencement. Late applications may only be considered in exceptional cases with formal acceptance of responsibility by the Head of Department or Director.

- Researchers at National Museums NI must complete a **Stage 1 Proposal Document** outlining the project's scope, objectives, methodologies, dependencies, and expected benefits. Projects requiring external funding are classified as **Large or Major** and require additional documentation before submission. Approval is granted based on strategic alignment, financial feasibility, and risk assessment. Proposals must receive endorsement from the relevant **Head of Department or Director**, with additional scrutiny for projects involving external collaborations, contractual agreements, or funding applications. The **Research Ethics and Integrity Checklist** is also required before commencement. Late applications may only be considered in exceptional cases with formal acceptance of responsibility by the Head of Department or Director.

Priority Themes

1. Identity and Cultural Diversity

Objective: Advance research that critically explores diverse and evolving identities, cultural expression, and cultural traditions, ensuring that National Museums NI's collections, interpretation and programmes reflect contemporary society and engage with contemporary issues.

Research Focus:
- **Heritage, Migration, and Identity** – Investigate how our collections help further understanding of cultural belonging, with a focus on how migration, diaspora, and evolving social identities influence heritage.
- **Inclusive Global Histories** – Examine the global histories and colonial legacies of collections, reassessing provenance and, through an inclusive approach that ensures marginalised voices are represented, promoting mutual respect and understanding.
- **Memory Studies and Public History** – Explore how memory, tradition, and commemoration shape public understanding of history and identity, using participatory research to ensure inclusivity.
- **Language and Cultural Expression** – Investigate the role of linguistic heritage, including research linked to the Inclusive Global Histories and the Languages of Ulster programmes, to understand how language shapes collective identity.

Research Approach:
This theme will employ archival research, oral histories, cultural studies, and digital humanities methodologies to enhance understanding and the interpretation of museum collections. National Museums NI will work collaboratively with local, source and newcomer communities, academic institutions, and policy bodies to ensure that research is inclusive and actively informs exhibitions, the development, care and management of collections, and public engagement strategies.

2. Peacebuilding – Local and Global Perspectives

Objective: Investigate the legacy of the past and support the social peace process through building understanding, encouraging dialogue, fostering reconciliation, and contributing to societal cohesion in post-conflict contexts.

Research Focus:
- **Legacies of Conflict and Contested Histories** – Examine the impact and legacy of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland and approaches to dealing with contested history.
- **Museums as Spaces for Dialogue and Empathy** – Research how museum interpretation, exhibitions, education programmes and collections can facilitate peacebuilding, reconciliation, and cross-community dialogue.
- **Personal Testimonies and Lived Experience** – Collect and analyse personal testimonies that capture diverse perspectives on conflict and peace, ensuring a wide representation of voices in museum narratives.
- **International Knowledge Exchange** – Explore how museums and collections respond to situations of conflict, legacies of conflict and experiences of peacebuilding, connecting past struggles to ongoing actions for positive social change.

Research Approach:
Building on initiatives such as The Troubles and Beyond and the Conflict and Legacy Interpretive Network, this theme will utilise qualitative research methods, conflict studies, and participatory approaches to ensure that Nationals Museums NI is playing a leading role in dialogue and development that contributes meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts. Research will inform curatorial strategies, educational programming, and international collaborations on post-conflict heritage management.

3. Environment and Sustainable Futures

Objective: Utilise museum collections, sites and expertise to research climate change, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable practices, embedding environmental responsibility within National Museums NI's research and operations.

Research Focus:
- **Natural Science Collections and Environmental Change** – Conduct scientific analysis of biodiversity loss, habitat shifts, and species decline, using historical specimens and contemporary fieldwork and collecting to monitor environmental change over time.
- **Sustainable Heritage and Conservation** – Investigate how museums can lead in sustainable collections care, management and interpretation, including research on low-carbon conservation methods and environmentally responsible exhibitions.
- **Human-Environmental Relationships** – Examine historical and contemporary connections between people, landscapes, and ecological systems, using museum collections as sources of environmental insight.
- **Community-Driven Climate Action** – Research how museums can support citizen science, community-led conservation initiatives, and public engagement in sustainability efforts.

Research Approach:
This theme will employ scientific research, environmental history, conservation science, and interdisciplinary collaborations to ensure that National Museums NI actively contributes to mitigating damaging environmental change, sustainability education and advocacy, and ecological preservation. Partnerships with conservation organisations, policymakers, and scientific institutions will ensure that research outcomes inform both museum practice and wider environmental discourse.

4. Innovation in Our Collections and Our Practice

Objective: Develop understanding of creativity and innovation through museum collections, and inspire new innovation including in how we manage and share the collections, ensuring that museum research remains responsive to societal and technological change.

Research Focus:
- **Innovation, Industry and Ideas** – Explore what museum collections can tell us about the development of society and the economy through progress over time, and how pioneers from the past can inform and inspire new generations of innovators and creatives.
- **Digital Innovation in Museum Practice** – Investigate the role of interactive platforms and immersive media in enhancing collections research and public access.
- **Participatory Research and Co-Creation** – Explore the benefits of community-led curation, audience-driven exhibition design, and collaborative research models.

- **STEAM Learning and Museum-Based Skills Development** – Examine how museums contribute to STEAM education, economic development and employability, and interdisciplinary knowledge exchange.
- **Advanced Conservation and Collections Management** – Research emerging techniques in preventive conservation, 3D scanning, and digital documentation, ensuring that heritage remains accessible and well conserved.

Research Approach:
This theme has its roots in the National Museums NI's collections, which speak to innovations in our past and the present, and are inspiring the future, on a local and global scale. From innovations that revolutionised the world of agriculture, advanced transport or helped saved lives, to artworks that are pushing the boundaries of material practice. Through partnerships with universities, creative industries, artists, and technology specialists, research will explore how museums can stimulate creativity, catalyse new thinking, create more engaging experiences, and develop future-facing collections management practices.

Recognised Research Outputs and Outcomes

In order to have maximum impact to our audiences, peers and partners, it is important that research is communicated effectively, correctly and visibly. Research at National Museums NI must have at least one of the following recognised outputs:

- Written Outputs
  - Books (authored, edited), book chapters, exhibition catalogues
  - Peer-reviewed publications (journal articles) or papers leading to a peer-reviewed publication (conference contribution, working paper)
  - Articles and contributions to non-peer-reviewed journals (e.g. subject specialist journals)
  - MA and PhD dissertations undertaken by National Museums NI staff
  - Research outputs required for other recognised and approved professional and academic accreditations
  - Reports from research commissioned and/or funded by an external organisation
  - Confidential reports, commissioned and/or funded by an external organisation
  - Online collections and databases
  - Content for National Museums NI website and partner websites such as Art UK
  - Blog entries
  - Grant proposals

- Oral Outputs
  - Public and conference talks
  - Interviews
  - Podcasts

- Exhibitions and Programming
  - Exhibitions and other interpreted spaces including historic buildings
  - Research outputs that support National Museums NI public programme

- Physical Artefacts
  - Artefact, objects or craftworks, exhibited, commissioned or otherwise presented or offered in the public domain created by staff of National Museums NI
  - Conservation of an object, building or collections that creates new knowledge

- Digital Artefacts[2]
  - Website content: a collection of material which embodies research and is undertaken on a systematic basis specifically for dissemination through a website and/or as an interactive approach to allow users to engage directly with the process of products of the research
  - Digital or visual media: research outputs presented in digitised and/or audio-visual format (e.g. films, documentaries, audio-visual presentations, computer games, animation, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality)

- Other forms of assessable output meeting the definition of research

Research Outcomes

The outcomes of research at National Museums NI extend beyond traditional academic contributions, driving institutional impact and public engagement. Research enhances **curatorial expertise, informs policy, shapes innovative public programming, and fosters new partnerships**. By prioritising rigorous and collaborative research, we strengthen our ability to **interpret collections in new ways, support educational initiatives, and**

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[2] See Annex K in *REF 2021: Guidance on Submissions*, p. 101-113 (rev. March 2020)

contribute to wider societal debates. Ultimately, our research outcomes reinforce the museum's role as a leading cultural institution, ensuring that our work remains relevant, accessible, and influential across diverse audiences.

4. Research Culture

'Research culture encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities. It influences researchers' career paths and determines the way that research is conducted and communicated'[3] (Research Culture, Royal Society).

'We want to help build a better research culture – one that is creative, inclusive and honest. Current practices prioritise outputs at almost any costs. This is damaging people's wellbeing and undermining the quality of research. We can all help to reimagine how research is conducted'[4] (Research Culture, Wellcome).

At National Museums NI, we are committed to fostering a research culture that upholds excellence, integrity, and innovation. We believe that high-quality research is best supported in an environment that values collaboration, openness, and recognition. Our research culture is shaped by the principles of inclusivity, ethical research practices, and the continuous development of our researchers and professionals.

We recognise that a supportive and dynamic research culture is fundamental to achieving research excellence. This involves not only the pursuit of knowledge but also the cultivation of collegiality and interdisciplinary collaboration. A thriving research culture is built through the collective actions of individuals and teams across the organisation, reflecting shared values, behaviours, and expectations that guide how research is conducted, communicated, and applied.

At National Museums NI, we acknowledge the growing emphasis placed by funders and policymakers on aspects of research culture, including equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI); research integrity and ethics; open research; and the broader impact of research on society. Our commitment to fostering a strong research culture aligns with these evolving expectations and ensures that our research remains robust, relevant, and inclusive.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Research Culture

A strong and supportive research culture must be built on the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). National Museums NI is committed to ensuring that all researchers, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from research. We actively work to remove barriers to participation and create an inclusive research environment where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated into our work.

Through policies, training, and inclusive leadership, we strive to foster a research culture that is representative of the communities we serve. By embedding EDI principles into our research frameworks, we ensure that our projects, partnerships, and public engagement activities reflect the richness of society and contribute meaningfully to knowledge creation and heritage interpretation.

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[3] https://royalsociety.org/news-resources/projects/research-culture/
[4] https://wellcome.org/what-we-do/our-work/research-culture

5. Measuring Success

To ensure the continued impact and relevance of our research, National Museums NI is committed to establishing clear metrics for measuring success. Success will be evaluated through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, including research outputs, public engagement reach, policy influence, as well as GLAM sector and academic contributions. We will track the number and impact of publications, research collaborations, and funding secured. Additionally, we will assess how our research informs exhibitions, digital engagement, and educational initiatives. Feedback from stakeholders, including museum audiences, community partners, and academic and GLAM sector peers, will be gathered to ensure that our research remains relevant and accessible. We will measure learning outcomes against National Museums NI's new framework of 'Act, Learn and Enjoy'. Regular evaluation and adaptive strategies will allow us to refine our research approach, ensuring that we continue to make meaningful contributions to both the museum sector and society as a whole.

APPENDIX A: Research Ethics and Integrity

National Museums NI is required to commit to the terms and conditions of the funders and its own collections ethics. Moreover, National Museums NI adheres to the commitments conveyed in the 2019 Concordat to Support Research Integrity:[5]

1- To uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
2- To ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
3- To support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers
4- To use transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
5- To work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly

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[5] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-08/Updated%20FINAL-the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf

APPENDIX B: Codes and Guidance

Our research activities are guided by the following ethical codes, which we require external researchers to follow:

a. All European Academies (ALLEA) European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity 2017[6]
b. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora [CITES] 1979[7]
c. DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums 2005[8]
d. ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums 2017[9]
e. Museums Association Code of Ethics for Museums 2015[10]
f. Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing 2022[11]
g. Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
h. Northern Ireland Department for Communities
i. UKRI Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct 2013[12]
j. UK Research Integrity Office Code of Practice for Research 2023[13]
k. Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity
l. UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, ratified Nov 2002
m. Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions, National Museum Directors Conference 1998
n. Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on collecting and borrowing Cultural Material, DCMS 2005
o. Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, DCMS 2005
p. Code of Ethics for Museums, Museums Association 2015
q. UK Export Licensing for Cultural Goods – Procedures and guidance for exporters of works of art and other cultural goods, Arts Council England 2011
r. ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (including the ICOM 'Red List')

All researchers are also required to follow National Museums NI policies:

s. Access Policy 2025
t. Collections Development Policy 2025
u. Collections Information and Access Policy 2024
v. Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2025
w. Collections Care and Conservation Plan 2025
x. Data Protection Policy and Procedure 2024
y. Environmental Sustainability Policy 2022
z. Ethics Policy 2025
aa. Exhibition Policy 2023
bb. Human Remains Policy 2025
cc. Lending and Borrowing Policy 2022
dd. Partnership Policy 2023
ee. Volunteering Policy 2024

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[6] ALLEA-European-Code-of-Conduct-for-Research-Integrity-2017.pdf

[7] https://cites.org/eng/disc/text.php

[8] Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums

[9] https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf

[10] https://archive-media.museumsassociation.org/09112015-code-ethics.pdf

[11] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/abs

[12] https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKRI-050321-PolicyGuidelinesGovernanceOfGoodResearchConduct.pdf

[13] https://ukrio.org/wp-content/uploads/UKRIO-Code-of-Practice-for-Research.pdf