

Fitzwilliam Museum Research & Impact Strategy 2022-2025

This strategy sets out the overarching principles for our research in the coming three years, and how we will use our expertise and collections to facilitate, stimulate and encourage the research of others. It is designed to inform decision-making, resource allocation and income generation.

VISION

Our diverse collections and audiences inspire our research, and we aim to ensure that our research inspires, involves and benefits those audiences. Our staff will draw upon both deep knowledge of, and diverse perspectives on, art and material culture to make a difference through innovative and relevant research. Our research will help us to explore the myriad ways in which art and culture touch people's lives, working with our audiences to develop knowledge, skills, agency and a sense of belonging, as well as enhancing health and wellbeing.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Fitzwilliam Museum's research will support and contribute towards the University's research excellence, with a particular focus on the Strategic Research Initiative *Collections - Connections - Communities* (2022-2024). The Museum will play a leading role in this Initiative, working across the University on a range of projects inspired by the collection, to catalyse research that is relevant to our audiences around the following themes:

- **Society & identity:** How do artworks, materials, objects and places of the past define community and individual identities?
- **Health & wellbeing:** How can health and wellbeing be improved through engagement with collections, and associated physical and digital spaces?
- **Environment & sustainability:** How do artworks and objects reflect our relationship with the natural world, and help inform future approaches to global environmental challenges?

We will achieve this through the following methodologies:

- **Collections, material and audience expertise:** celebrating and amplifying deep curatorial knowledge of the artwork and material culture, complemented by specialisms in researching the materiality of objects and artworks, and our audiences' engagement with those collections;
- **Visual literacy:** encouraging new ways of looking at artworks and material culture;
- **Participation & collaboration:** diversifying the voices and perspectives within our research, contributing to inclusivity and relevance;
- **Physical/virtual:** using emerging digital techniques to drive research, its impact and interaction between disciplines and collections.

- **Evaluation & improvement:** measuring and defining impact and change prompted by our research, and using that evidence to inform new projects.

FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM CONTEXT

The Museum's [Mission and Strategic Framework](#) (2019) sets out a vision:

'to produce and promote innovative, relevant and interdisciplinary research of the highest quality around our collection [...] by fully unifying our public benefit roles and our collaborative research activity, we will play an ever more crucial role in the University of Cambridge's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence'.

Founded in 1816 'for the increase of learning', the Fitzwilliam Museum is widely considered the world's outstanding university art collection, in its entirety [designated](#) as of national significance and quality. We care for, display and research around 500,000 artworks and objects, principally from Europe, the Nile Valley, the Middle East, South and East Asia, alongside archive and library holdings of immense research potential. This includes many items of exceptional international importance, works that connect people across cultures and time. The Fitzwilliam is a major part of the [UK's research infrastructure](#), encouraging physical and virtual access to collections by providing facilities, equipment and online resources that others can use.

Alongside being a great public cultural asset welcoming up to 500,000 visitors annually and over 400,000 via our website, our collections provide the foundation for extraordinary research, by our staff and researchers from across the University, UK and globe. Being a university museum provides a unique intellectual context on which this strategy builds: our collections and expertise enable us to create spaces, with our diverse audiences, for discussion and disruption.

As part of the University of Cambridge, the Museum's research and impact activity aligns with University-level policies on [equality and diversity](#), [defining research](#), [research ethics](#), [research misconduct](#), [integrity](#) and [sustainability](#). The University is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment ([DORA](#)) and a founding member of [Athena SWAN](#).

The Museum employs curators, scientists and conservators alongside digital and learning experts who are research-active and research-independent. They conduct investigation into, or inspired by, the collections and related material, grounded in specialist curatorial knowledge of artworks and material culture (with particular strengths in European art history, Egyptology, Classical Archaeology, Manuscripts and Numismatics), and in the related disciplinary fields of conservation, heritage science, digital humanities and learning practice. These researchers design or co-design projects, deliver scholarly outputs, mentor and supervise postgraduate students and Early Career Researchers, while contributing to the broader curation, development and care of the collections, and audience engagement with those objects and artworks. Research activity is enhanced through research grants and philanthropic support.

The Fitzwilliam Museum and the Department of History of Art, with Kettle's Yard, together form a dynamic research environment focused on visual culture, which was submitted to the History of Art Unit as part of the University's contribution to Research England's [Research Excellence Framework](#) (REF) 2021. *Collections - Connections - Communities* will strengthen these links and catalyse new and enhanced collaborations across the University.

PRINCIPLES

The Museum will undertake research and impact activities that align with the following principles:

1. **Creative & ambitious: the Fitzwilliam Museum and its staff**

- 1.1. We will create clear and transparent organisational structures and processes that allow our research active staff to flourish, allowing them to be engines for ideas, collaborative partnerships and research excellence that support Mission aims, deliver high quality outputs for REF, whilst retaining academic freedom;
- 1.2. We will develop a supportive, inclusive and collaborative research culture that encourages deep learning of the collections, collaboration, innovation and the asking of challenging research questions that create impact and change;
- 1.3. We will ensure object-specialist- and audience-specialist knowledge remains at the heart of our research;
- 1.4. We will support the training and career development of our staff, both within the museum and University, and through partnerships with other institutions, to develop academic leaders of the future.
- 1.5. We will enable our staff to develop partnerships and collaborations across the creative, cultural and higher education sectors.

2. **Distinctive & innovative: the Fitzwilliam Museum within the University**

- 2.1. We will work closely with University researchers to leverage our specific collections expertise for research and impact, whether in areas of shared expertise (art history, classical archaeology, Egyptology, manuscripts, digital humanities) or where the Fitzwilliam Museum has distinctive specialisms (numismatics, learning practise, heritage science, conservation);
- 2.2. We will forge transdisciplinary collaborations across the University's Schools and academic Departments, research institutions and networks to amplify expertise and collections-based research, including around how visual literacy can shape ideas and research questions;
- 2.3. We will collaborate with the University of Cambridge Museums, the University Library and other collections in Cambridge to conduct research that cuts across institutional and disciplinary boundaries;
- 2.4. We will seek, in collaboration with other University institutions, to provide support (expertise, infrastructure, access) to the wider Higher Education, museum, library and cultural sector, particularly in areas of expertise such as heritage science and practice-based learning, digital humanities and conservation research.
- 2.5. We will seek closer connections with Colleges, further enhancing our partnerships within the wider Cambridge research environment.

3. **Relevant & collaborative: the Fitzwilliam Museum and its audiences**

- 3.1. We will undertake collaborative, participatory research with audiences and communities (locally, regionally, globally), and organisations (including regional stakeholders and the commercial sector), to explore how we can creatively de-centre our research, embed a multiplicity of perspectives on the collections, and be better informed by lived experience, expertise and perspectives beyond academia.
- 3.2. We will be a space for cultural debate for our diverse audiences, nucleating discussion and collaborating on projects around key societal challenges, including changing community identities, the legacies of colonialism, political extremism, inequalities of health and wellbeing, and environment and sustainability.

- 3.3. We will use the Museum's and University's channels for sharing and collaborating on research and impact outputs, from the research process to publications and displays, using physical, hybrid and virtual methodologies, and employing innovative storytelling techniques to reflect on and respond to our audiences diverse perceptions;
 - 3.4. We will evaluate the processes, methodologies and outputs of our research, informing the design of future projects to ensure good practice, relevance to our audiences, and engaging sharing of that research;
 - 3.5. We will ensure undergraduate and postgraduate students from within and beyond Cambridge have access to our collections and expertise through sessions in galleries, study rooms and virtually. Fitzwilliam Museum researchers will supervise research students undertaking MPhils and PhDs, as well as providing access to the collections and world-leading training courses through the Hamilton Kerr Institute for Conservation.
- 4. Inclusive & sustainable: access to Fitzwilliam Museum research for all**
- 4.1. We will develop research projects that take a responsible approach to innovation, assessing the design, methodologies and outputs of projects for their approaches to challenging/controversial topics; equality, diversity and inclusivity; relevance; sustainability and consideration of unintended consequences;
 - 4.2. We will play a leading role in distributed and sustainable research infrastructures and knowledge exchange networks, and seek to contribute to the formation of policy in relevant sectors;
 - 4.3. We will create an inclusive workplace, culture and research environment that values and draws on a range of experiences and perspectives. We aim to support the diversity of future researchers and enhance the diversity of our staff who are research active.
 - 4.4. We will serve the UK and international research community by ensuring our research and collections are available online and through Study Room provision, where possible in free, open and reusable formats, and securely archived for future generations, to catalyse research inspired and informed by our collection;
 - 4.5. We will create and sustain research partnerships that support the creative and heritage economies, particularly in the areas of conservation and technology, and through the activities of the Hamilton Kerr Institute for Conservation;
 - 4.6. We will actively champion environmental sustainability through our research-led collaborations and work with audiences, and aim to inspire and enact change;
 - 4.7. Building on the foundations provided by our existing institutional funders (University, Research England, Arts Council England), we will diversify our revenue generation around research & impact activity with a focus on larger and more strategic research- and philanthropic-funded projects that can be foundations for the Masterplan, and enhance our research infrastructure.

GOVERNANCE

Our research is co-ordinated and overseen by four groups that bring together internal and external experts to provide guidance, constructive feedback and make decisions as appropriate.

- **Research & Impact Group:** The purpose of the Group is to oversee and provide guidance for all research and impact activity at the Fitzwilliam, from the initial generation of ideas to

the resulting outputs and outcomes of projects. The Group, which meets monthly, is chaired by the Deputy Director (Collections and Research), with representatives from across the Museum's research staff and the research facilitation team, and including early career researchers. Other colleagues can be co-opted if specific expertise is needed. Ethical approvals for specific projects are overseen by the R&I group with input from the Head of Learning, in line with relevant guidance and legislation.

- **Research Committee:** The Committee provides strategic oversight of the Museum's research and research-centred activities and, through advice, advocacy and consultation, ensures that the Museum is contributing, and acknowledged as a contributor, to the research profile and output of the University. The group meets once per academic term, and is chaired by a senior researcher in a relevant University department, with members drawn from a range of University departments, and up to two external representatives.
- **Research Advisory Group:** The Group provides guidance, input and support towards the delivery of the Research & Impact Strategy, through bringing in perspectives, experience and expertise from outside the University of Cambridge, on the wider national and international research environment, that can help shape future projects, programmes, collaborations and strategic priorities. The Group comprises up to six external members, representing research disciplines and institutions relevant to our research, and meets annually, with each external member visiting Cambridge once during their three-year term to meet with research active staff.
- **Fitzwilliam Museum Syndicate:** responsible for overall oversight of the research activity of the Fitzwilliam, within the context of wider museum activity and resources.

Financial sustainability and monitoring is assured through the approval of major projects via the Senior Management Team, and thereafter through reporting to the Research & Impact Group and Finance, particularly through post-award and post-project reporting. Funding applications, governance and reporting follow the guidelines set by the University's [Research Operations Office](#).

REVIEW

This strategy will normally be reviewed every 3 years. The Research & Impact group will be responsible for submitting a revised Strategy to the Research Committee, and thereafter seeking formal approval by Syndicate.

Approved by Syndicate: 22 November 2021