

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

RESEARCH STRATEGY 2012–15

1. Background

For a number of years, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums' (TWAM's) focus has been the delivery of excellent front line public services. Collections and audience research has played a supporting role to inform public programming, and has underpinned the work of, for example, Tyne & Wear Museums' Archaeology Unit, the Archives' public enquiry service, and museum visitor service improvements.

To date, research activity has been piecemeal, often project-funded and therefore short term. Other strategic priorities for TWAM have resulted in a lack of research coordination and planning and a move away from research as a core function of all museum practice.

2. Moving Forward

In April 2012, the ACE Major Partner Museums' programme provided a catalyst for a three year commitment from TWAM to take a coordinated and strategic approach to research activity. A research manager was appointed to review and co-ordinate research across the organisation and to foster new research partnerships.

3. Strategic Aims

The strategic aims of TWAM's Research Strategy are:

- a) to deepen knowledge which underpins the stewardship and development of our collections for greater public engagement and academic insight
- b) to deepen understanding of our audiences to help us to stimulate curiosity in all our users and encourage a journey of deeper investigation and discovery

These aims are articulated in TWAM's Corporate Plan 2012-15:

- Manage collections effectively to ensure that they are thriving and used as a dynamic resource (Priority 5)

and in Arts Council England's strategic goals:

- promote and celebrate excellence in the sector through the development of collections and greater public engagement with them (Goal 1)
- More people experience and are inspired by museums & libraries (Goal 2).

TWAM's commitment is based on the premise that research will not be conducted in isolation as an end in itself but should be purposed to support the mission, vision and priorities of the organisation (attached as Appendix 1).

4. Strategic Objectives

This Research Strategy has the following objectives:

- To give staff and other stakeholders a sense of ownership through knowledge – “Our Museum”
- To generate a research culture within the organisation which stimulates creativity and achievement to underpin public engagement activity
- To position TWAM as a key resource for external or co-directed academic projects which should support TWAM research priorities and have tangible public outputs
- To attract new funding streams which develop our collections and audiences.

In the current management context whereby TWAM operates both university and local authority museums/archives and galleries, a broad approach to research will be adopted to achieve the strategic aims and objectives. Research activity will take place at several levels and include:

- the capture of known information and of new knowledge about collections, subjects and audiences
- research which contributes to public understanding and engagement (e.g. exhibition research)
- the encouragement of self directed research by users (browser-searcher-researcher journey)
- co-directed museum/archive/academic research projects which support museum/archive practice.

The risks of not having an effective research strategy are:

- Failure to grow knowledge/interpretation of our collections, audiences and subjects in line with audience needs and expectations, leading to
- Compromised delivery of cutting-edge interpretation, learning, publication and digital media programmes
- Loss of reputation, audiences, academic stakeholders and related funding opportunities
- Failure to maximize opportunities to expand research into our collections, audiences and related subjects
- Inability to develop collections through informed acquisitions
- Inability to attract and retain high calibre staff.

5. Achieving the Aims

To achieve the above aims, TWAM is committed to:

- Work in partnership with universities, research groups, specialists, societies, national and regional museums, archives and galleries and Subject Specialist Networks. Partnerships give TWAM access to expertise not available in-house and will help to underpin new intellectual developments. In turn, greater access to collections will facilitate and support new partnership opportunities.
- Harness knowledge from our users (visitors, volunteers and on-line users)
- Support staff development opportunities, where possible, which build collections/subject knowledge, expertise and understanding
- Promote creativity through the sharing of knowledge and ideas amongst staff, stakeholders and the research community
- Develop and facilitate collections access for greater investigation and research purposes
- Disseminate research findings to a wide audience through exhibitions, talks and conference participation, learning programmes and other events, online and journal publications and co-written academic literature
- Develop a three year research plan which identifies research themes, questions and priorities for action related to our curatorial and public programmes.

As a result, the strategy will support TWAM in increasing research capability and profile, creating and harnessing knowledge which supports TWAM's overarching mission.

6. Research Strategy Standards and Parameters

- We will be mindful of all issues that have ethical and IPR implications and apply appropriate controls in line with relevant national policies
- We will publish a code of practice for all researchers using TWAM resources
- Identified research areas will focus on:
 - the evidence-base represented by our extensive and developing collections which provide a unique research dimension
 - the museological aspects of our programmes and the evaluating and testing of those that have been recently completed
 - how our audiences interact/ learn/ construct knowledge
 - Our Museum (Paul Hamlyn Foundation project) community research questions 1) rooted in the community, 2) community agency, 3) capability building and 4) organisational reflection

7. TWAM Research Strategic Plan

2012–13

Strategic priorities

- To consolidate existing research activity and partnerships
- To create a foundation for renewed staff focus on research and the sharing and creating of knowledge
- To ensure increased virtual and physical collections access for research purposes
- To develop stakeholders' understanding of the role research plays in delivering quality public programmes

The immediate priority for collections based research will be data enhancement upon which to build good research.

The immediate priorities for audience research are to answer a number of research enquiries into TWAM's learning provision for young people and TWAM's relationship with the community.

Objectives

Collections:

- To record the number and type of current research enquiries and map existing research activities and partnerships
- To establish areas of need for collections research
- To identify research objectives in collections development strategy for science technology and maritime history pilot.
- To build volunteer and curatorial programmes of knowledge capture
- To encourage venues/collections/team research plans through an away day event
- To establish academic liaison role at Great North Museum with Newcastle University
- To launch a collections online search facility
- To develop two collections access points and a related collections access programme, including research talks

Audiences:

- To roll out Learning Innovations research enquiries plan
- To roll out Year One of the Our Museum project

Organisational:

- To publish a code of practice for external researchers
- To set up familiarisation visits for academics and student engagement projects/studentships
- To improve GNM research facilities/resources including accessing research resources through partners
- To organise refresher research skills training and develop staff skills in identifying sources of research income, writing research grant and exhibition applications and supervising meaningful researcher placements
- To launch partnership collaboration agreement with Northumbria University and roll out joint projects
- To develop teaching/research relationship with Durham University and Sunderland University
- To engage with partners (e.g. British Museum, Leeds Museums/Leeds University) in fostering relations between universities, regional museums and TWAM
- To develop staff knowledge through internal activities (e.g. knowledge sharing events, away day, research talks)
- To establish interdepartmental communication to align and embed co-ordinated research in curatorial/museological practice, supporting key exhibitions and projects, including Festival of the North East, Creative Exchange, Making of Modern Tyneside gallery, Science Festival, Our Museum action research, Designation Challenge Fund, RCUK Schools – University When You Leave School, Cutting Edge (Newcastle University)
- To highlight research activities on the TWAM website and relate them to tangible public outputs

2013-14

Strategic priorities

- To support the progression of identified research themes/questions relating to exhibition programming, audiences and museological practice
- To enhance further collections access onsite and online for research purposes

- To bid for, and take forward, identified academic partnership projects

Objectives

- To publish Making of Modern Tyneside papers in selected journals/conferences to add value to new gallery
- To deliver Festival of the North East research and dissemination events
- To support research planning for 2014-15 World War 1 commemoration & possible conference
- To develop research relating to Star Objects programme
- To encourage new researchers by engaging them with our collections and in our programmes
- To take forward audience research lead by Learning Innovations team
- To support university teaching and research, seek opportunities and funding for joint university/museum staff appointments and exchanges and increase the number of collaborative studentships
- To prioritise collections for enhanced online content and continue programme of knowledge capture, including Designation Development Fund project (science collections)
- To increase audiences for public talks/research related workshops with key note speakers
- To roll out research element of the collections development strategy as informed by the 2013-14 pilot
- To increase the number of staff engaged with HEI partnerships, conferences and advisory boards
- To work across venues and disciplines to support and develop research objectives and this year's projects, including Universities UK Campaign, Understanding Everyday Participation (Gateshead), Our Museum –community approaches pilot.

2014–15

Strategic priorities

- To deliver research-based public programmes and increase audiences
- To build on the previous year's research partnerships and explore new ones with national and international partners

Research Strategy v.1 LG

- To build upon the previous year's research into TWAM's engagement with young people and the community
- To continue the development of online collections resources
- To build on the Research Strategy 2012–15 and plan next phase of research activity and outputs.

Objectives

- Implement Our Museum research findings
- Find conference funding and partner/sponsor for WW1 exhibition/events programme
- Implement Star Objects exhibition programme and support Science Museum's Time Out object loans programme
- Increase number of research users and partners
- Increase audiences for public talks/research related workshops
- Increase number of staff engaged with HEI partnerships, conferences and advisory boards and support training needs
- Continue to develop our knowledge base for prioritised collections and share knowledge online.

Appendix 1

TWAM Mission, Vision and Beliefs

Our **mission** is to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others.

Our **vision** for the future is for everyone to have access to museum and archive provision in Tyne and Wear, to use this access and to value it for the significant and positive impact that it makes upon their lives. We will provide real or virtual, worldwide access to our museums and archives and their collections.

Our **commitment** is to a World-class service that is innovative, imaginative, creative, totally inclusive, secure and sustainable.

Beliefs

At TWAM we believe that we:

- make a positive difference to people's lives
- inspire and challenge people to explore their world
- are a powerful learning resource for people of all needs and backgrounds
- act as an agent of economic regeneration and help build and develop communities and the aspirations of individuals
- are fully accountable to our stakeholders and users
- should make our resources accessible to everyone

(TWAM Corporate Plan 2012-15).