



# LONDON MUSEUM



RESEARCH STRATEGY

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2026-2031

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We will keep this document under evaluation. Comments to assist future reviews of our research are welcome. Please contact in the first instance: [research@londonmuseum.org.uk](mailto:research@londonmuseum.org.uk)

# LONDON MUSEUM

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London Museum is the biggest city museum in the world. We care for over seven million objects – the London Collection – that showcase the lives and stories of people who have called this place home since prehistoric times.

We are in the middle of an extraordinary transformation marked by the move to our new home in Smithfield, and the once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconceive what a museum for London can be.

At the core of this evolution is a deep commitment to integrating research into every facet of our work, from pioneering exhibitions and practice-based research to creating engaging public programmes and making our collection accessible to the wider public online and across all our sites. Cities are multifaceted spaces, and such complexity has a research potential that can be harnessed at a local, national and international scale with far reaching societal impacts. This research strategy takes account of and responds to this unique and exciting period in the history of the organisation, capitalising on the new opportunities for the profile, role and scope of research activity within the organisation.

London Museum will open in 2026 breathing new life into the historic General Market building at Smithfield. From 2028, our second building, the Poultry Market will open to the public showcasing the museum's collection stores along with world-class temporary exhibitions and learning spaces. This site will also host our new Research Centre with state-of-the-art conservation labs and library, which will open up new opportunities for connecting audiences with our collection.

Research and deep public engagement are the two driving forces that will be central to our activities in Smithfield across all our locations and online. It will guide the ongoing development of the London Museum Docklands in Canary Wharf, which houses our **London, Sugar & Slavery gallery (LSS)**, as well as our **Port & River collection**. Research will also play a pivotal role in reimagining the London Museum Stores in Hackney, which hosts the **Archaeological Archive** and our world-class bioarchaeology collection, comprising artefacts from every excavation in the Greater London area since the Second World War. We will consolidate and build on our research and content development work at **Smithfield**.

We build from the strengths of the London Collection, our own history as a museum that has impacted public understanding and seek to engage with contemporary questions and research priorities. We fulfil our mandate set out in the Act of 1965 and in this we have a duty to facilitate those who undertake their own enquiry as well as applying our own set of research objectives and actions as set out in this document.



# OUR RESEARCH TRACK RECORD

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We have a long-standing reputation and proven track record for using our world-class collection to deliver high-quality research across a wide range of museum departments in collaboration with academic and non-academic partners. The museum has long been known as a centre for research on the archaeology of the City, dating back to the creation of the Department of Urban Archaeology in 1973. It has also pioneered research into the lived experiences of Londoners through its collecting of over 5,000 hours of oral histories and the Peopling of London project in the 1990s. In the past research has informed our exhibitions, displays, learning materials, films and publications. More recently, museum staff have been active in a number of areas:

- Our human bioarchaeology curators have been supporting and undertaking research for over 20 years
- Our curatorial staff have been supervising collaborative PhDs via the LAHP and TECHNE consortia and regularly act as peer reviewers and PhD examiners
- We supported for many years the University of Westminster MA Museums, Galleries and Contemporary Culture, and delivered a summer school with King's College London
- Our London Sugar & Slavery Gallery has attracted a significant amount of international interest over the years from academics involved in topics relating to the British Trade of Enslaved Africans, and we are participants in the Transatlantic Slavery and Legacies in Museums forum.
- The Curating London programme, launched in 2018, has resulted in a regular series of partnerships with HEIs exploring a range of contemporary London topics, resulting in groundbreaking research and informing policy recommendations. Selected highlights include:
  - *Museum, Class and the Pandemic* developed in collaboration with King's College London resulted in several peer-reviewed publications and contributed to securing a Collaborative Doctoral Award.
  - *Calling for Change* delivered with Partnership for Young London captured young people's views on sustainability, affordable transport, greener spaces, and youth involvement. The Mayor's Office endorsed the report, using its insights to shape city environmental policies.
- Over the last decade we have partnered in some major national and international research projects, often resulting in exhibitions, displays and scholarly publications. Selected highlights include:
  - *Roman Dead*, an interdisciplinary exhibition about the cemeteries of Roman London, examining the grave-goods, people and burial practices. It drew on research collaborations with Durham University, University of Bradford, Kings College London, McMaster University (Canada), University of Copenhagen (Denmark) and Michigan State University (USA)
  - *Complex*, an ERC-funded project exploring system dynamics for managing plastic degradation in museums in partnership with UCL's Institute for Sustainable Heritage.
  - *Fashion and Science*, a project exploring existing and emerging technologies related to fibre and textile analysis with the Courtauld Institute of Art and the University of Copenhagen Centre for Textile Research.

# OUR RESEARCH VISION

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Research is written into the very DNA of London Museum and our mission to better understand London and all its people.

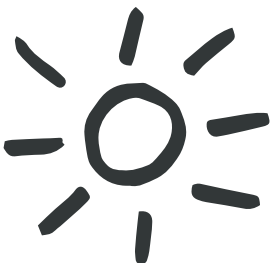
Our vision for research is:

**We will undertake and facilitate research of the highest calibre, harnessing the power of our collection and partnerships to better understand London and its people in the past, present and future.**

We will bring all the potential of the Museum through its Collections, Curation and Collaborations to deliver this vision.

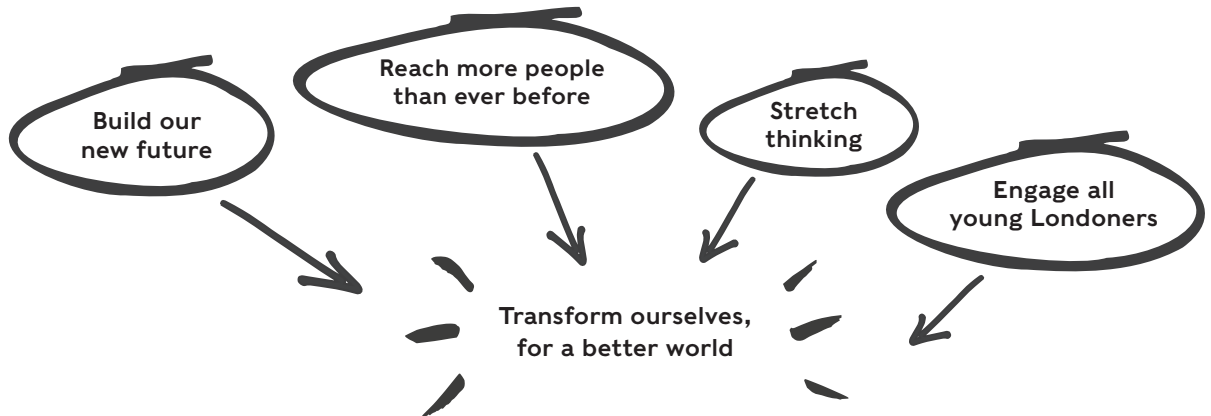
Our work results in a number of outputs, from peer-reviewed publications to informing content across our sites and online. It also benefits the museum and our audiences or partners in many ways:

- It broadens understanding of the collections, allowing new stories to be told, and improving access to, and care of the collections themselves, making them more visible to both researchers and the wider public.
- It keeps us at the forefront of knowledge and discussions about London's history and significance.
- It improves the lives of the communities we engage with, delivering real-world tangible impact.
- It enables us to innovate, forming new ways of working across departments, disciplines and institutions, making our collections more relevant to contemporary London and Londoners.
- It helps in the creation of new, surprising and engaging exhibitions and public programmes both onsite and online.
- It allows us to expand scholarship through teaching and by partnering with HEIs to deliver doctoral training partnerships.
- It further enhances the museum's international reputation and standing.
- It deploys the London Collection to support critical thinking around London's history and contemporary experience.



# ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT 2026-2031

Research contributes to the delivery of our Strategic Plan (2023-2028) and has a role to play in how we achieve each of our strategic objectives. These are to:

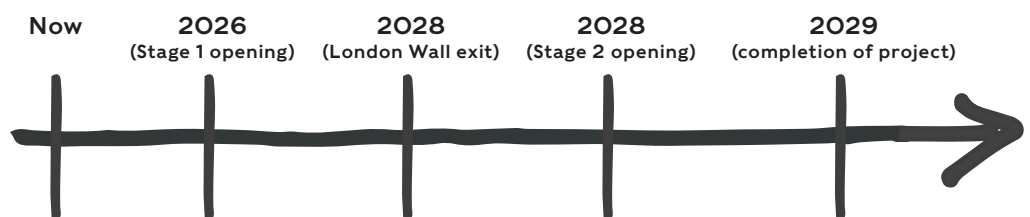


Alongside our strategic objectives, the research that we undertake is framed by other Museum policies and procedures, in particular our Collections Management and Development policies, our Engagement Framework, and our Equality Diversity & Inclusion strategy all of which are overseen by our Board of Governors

During the timespan of this strategy the Museum will transform. By the end of the strategy all parts of the building will be open including our new Research Centre, conservation labs and library. Our new programming, exhibitions and business model will be fully operational, our profile will be high, our funding more secure and we will have many new collaborations and partnerships.

In the early years after opening there are constraints on our research capabilities, and our plan takes this into account. In preparation for our move to Smithfield – relocating nearly half a million items - we are auditing, photographing, barcoding and packing the collection stored at our old site. During this period, physical access to our collection is necessarily focused on London Museum Docklands. We expect to resume full access to our collection at London Museum Spaces and London Museum Stores post-2028. While this necessary work will temporarily restrict physical access to some of our collection, a significant portion remains accessible digitally providing ongoing opportunities for research and engagement. The improved object records will greatly enhance the future research potential of the collection and support richer and more engaging content for the new museum.

## HIGH LEVEL PROGRAMME – STAGE 1/2



# EXTERNAL RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

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In shaping this strategy and the following research principles, we recognise that the research landscape is undergoing significant transformations driven amongst other things by new digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and wider societal challenges including our response to the climate emergency and increasing distrust in traditional sources of knowledge and information.

A shifting funding landscape places greater emphasis on the importance of developing partnerships both within and beyond the heritage sector. This includes collaborations with Higher Education Institutions, community organizations, and the broader heritage sector among others. This strategy aligns with wider strategic research priorities, such as those set out by UKRI and IROC among others. Changes in doctoral provisions further emphasize the need for a research infrastructure that prioritizes partnership and collaboration. This changing landscape offers new opportunities to strengthen our research network and to ensure that our work continues to contribute meaningfully to key strategic topics and questions.



# THREE RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

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As London's shared place in the middle of it all the Museum aspires to physically embody openness and inclusion through its extended opening hours, its radically different approach to the customer welcome and its championing of ordinary Londoners voices and lived experience. The Museum's research strategy mirrors this approach. As the museum for one of the most diverse cities on earth, we see embedding lived experience, diverse perspectives and knowledge in all its forms as fundamental to our research, valuing dialogue and collaboration across various forms of expertise, including academic and practice based.

These principles guide the London Museum model and priorities for research activities, identifying what is distinct about our research offer and approach and how we will create greatest impact through advancing innovation, collaboration and knowledge generation.

**1. Have public benefit:** As an organisation that is dedicated to public engagement, we expect our research outputs and those of our partners to be shareable and useable in and through the museum's work in our galleries, publications, and online. We expect our curators, researchers, content partners and our collections and engagement teams to build in opportunities for research into their ongoing work.

**2. Harnessing London's urban heritage:** London and all its people are our starting point. The London Collection represents an enormous three-dimensional archive that offers deep and unique research opportunities. We are interested in London's history and its position as the capital in relation to other cities nationally and internationally, and we will utilise our collections and our expertise to unlock the research potential within this. Our heartland is the London boroughs, and we will follow their sphere of influence to the commuter belt and beyond.

**3. Embracing innovation:** We are committed to promote the very best practices in all areas of research, embracing innovation while recognising the challenges and opportunities it brings. Responding to the rapid evolution of digital technologies, AI, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and public engagement demands strategic vision, time and effort. Through our research approach, we are ready to engage with these opportunities and harness their full potential

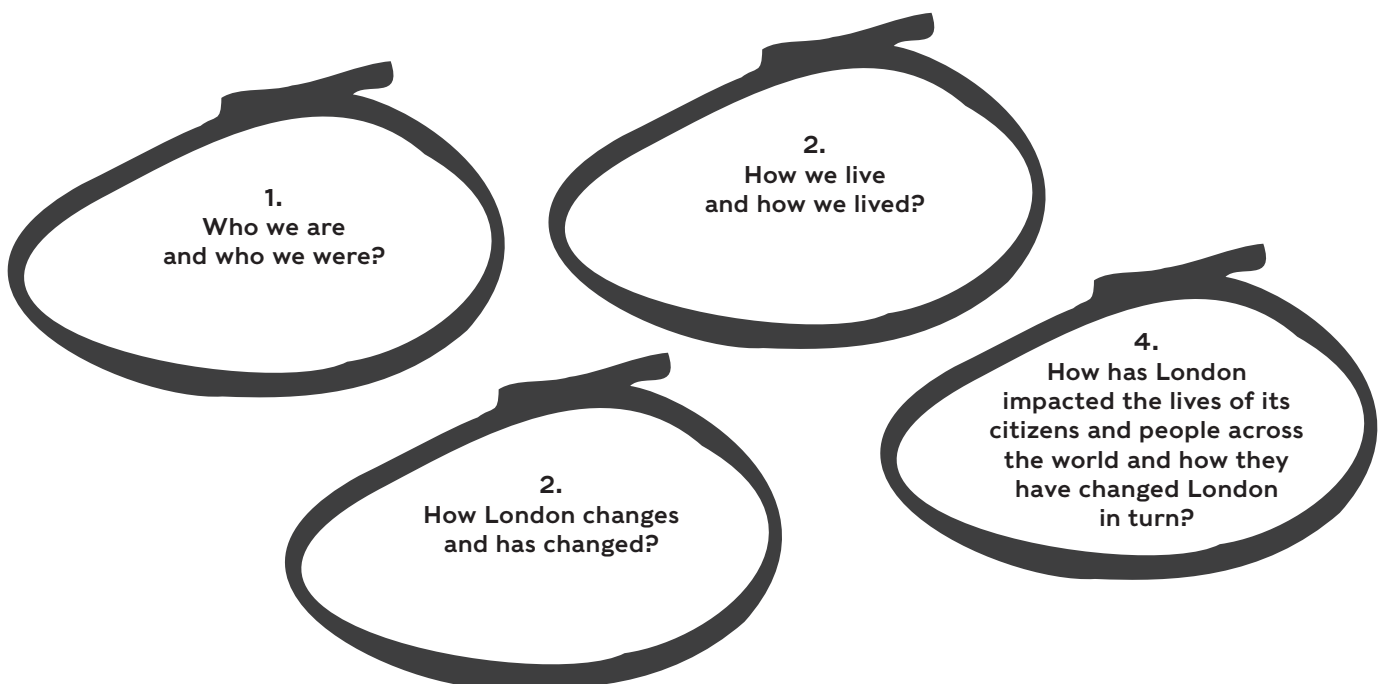
# OVERARCHING THEMES

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London Museum explores London through the interplay of people, place and time. Over time the London Collection has been built as a record of millions of lives. The extent of our collection, its breadth and scale enable us to explore an individual life or whole populations.

All of the content decisions that we make are defined by the museums Content Framework which was developed by the museum in 2014 and provides an overarching context for our research agenda.

London Museum considers London through four themes framed as questions.



Research at the Museum will always be considered through these four themes and the research priorities below have been identified as those which will move our work forward so that we can be more impactful.

# RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Our research priorities are articulated in two complementary strands focused around (i) progressing our research areas of interest and (ii) building our research infrastructure.

## RESEARCH AREAS OF INTEREST

A first set of research priorities outlines our areas of interest and commitment to advancing knowledge, fostering collaboration, and ensuring our collections are at the forefront of both scholarly inquiry and public engagement. By consolidating research through a new dedicated Research Centre, expanding networks regionally and globally, and embedding community-driven research, we aim to enrich our understanding of London's diverse history and its ongoing challenges. Our activities focus on connecting the past with present issues, particularly around sustainability, urban development, and social justice, while enhancing exhibitions and programming with impactful research.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTIVITY	IMPACT
Establish a new Research Centre – programme and model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; London Museum research activities consolidated into centralised programme delivered through Research Centre.</li> <li>&gt; Distinct London Museum model and approach to research established and evolving.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Growth in profile, scope and impact of London Museum-produced research activities.</li> <li>&gt; Growth in research outputs enabled by use of museum assets by external researchers aligned around shared areas of interest.</li> </ul>
Building regional, national, and international networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Develop research capacity across London's local museums through our Museum Development Team including opportunities for research grants programmes across smaller London museums.</li> <li>&gt; Through a network of Global City Museums create opportunities for programmes that contribute understanding new futures to urban living that attracts international funding and profile.</li> <li>&gt; Enhance knowledge of London Collection by exploring links with other collections nationally and internationally.</li> <li>&gt; Build a more collaborative approach with our sister organisation MOLA that creates a new powerful contribution to archaeology.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Support the London museum sector to pursue innovative research projects that enhance their knowledge of their collections and their local community heritage</li> <li>&gt; Global perspectives will bring diverse insights and innovative solutions to local issues.</li> <li>&gt; The museum accesses international funding.</li> <li>&gt; Align with sector trends, explore new cross-disciplinary and cross-collection research opportunities.</li> </ul>

PRIORITY AREA	ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>Research rooted in London's diverse communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Align our research practice with the museums Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, with a focus on conducting research through an anti-racist lens, and recognising the many histories previously under researched, e.g. class, gender and sexual orientation.</li> <li>➤ Enhance co-produced research centring knowledge from lived experience.</li> <li>➤ Research our collection to uncover and highlight London's historic and contemporary diversity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Contribute to developing a more diverse and inclusive research environment across the sector.</li> <li>➤ Promote best practices in co-produced research, enhancing the quality and impact of research projects.</li> <li>➤ Findings enhance the relevance of our collection in reflecting the diverse history of London.</li> </ul>
<p>Designing research to contribute to London Museum exhibitions and programming</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Actively pursue opportunities aligned with high profile public programming and temporary exhibitions – including Our Time contemporary themes and major temporary exhibitions in Poultry Market.</li> <li>➤ Collaborate with exhibitions and programming teams to establish pipeline of research needs and propositions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Impactful research is at the core of museum's exhibitions and public programmes.</li> <li>➤ Exhibitions and displays are supported by high quality research leading to more engaging content.</li> </ul>
<p>Developing the unique research proposition at London Museum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ensure research is central to the ongoing development of London Docklands content including dedicated focus on the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery (LSS).</li> <li>➤ Foster research into London's role as a global centre for trade and Empire, including its links to transatlantic slavery.</li> <li>➤ Integrated practice-based and artist-led research into the ongoing development of the LSS Gallery and Reflection Room.</li> <li>➤ Strengthen understanding of our site and legacy, by supporting research into the Richard Westmacott's statue of Robert Milligan.</li> <li>➤ Foster research into the histories of the communities who have and currently live and work in the East End of London.</li> <li>➤ Develop a research agenda around the history of the Smithfield Markets and their national and international significance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Overlooked narratives are unearthed, contributing to the academic discourse on urban history, and the development of new learning resources.</li> <li>➤ Artist-led research will bring fresh perspectives, transforming curatorial approaches.</li> <li>➤ Contribute to discussions on public memory and the criticalities associated to the legacy of monuments and memorials.</li> <li>➤ Develop academic knowledge around the history of Smithfield's role in meat trading within the UK and throughout the British Empire.</li> </ul>

PRIORITY AREA	ACTIVITY	IMPACT
<p>Enhancing research potential of our Archaeological and osteological collections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Undertake scientific and interdisciplinary research to reveal new insights into London's past through our archaeological and osteological collections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Developing methodologies for integrating osteological and archaeological data in urban heritage contexts.</li> </ul>
<p>Adding new understanding on London and the Climate Crisis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Explore our archaeology collection to trace historical changes in London's environment.</li> <li>➤ Undertake research with under-represented Londoners and young people in particular, to document their lived experience.</li> <li>➤ Partner with HEIs and commercial organisations to research our operations, in particular smart building innovations, and share findings with sector.</li> <li>➤ Research and test more sustainable techniques and materials for the preservation of objects.</li> <li>➤ Evaluate plastics with limited life spans in our collection, and undertake research on new materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Understanding of how our collection intersects with environmental changes.</li> <li>➤ More inclusive understanding of climate impacts, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in climate discourse.</li> <li>➤ Setting new standards for museums and cultural institutions in environmental stewardship.</li> <li>➤ Advanced understanding of eco-friendly conservation practices and reducing waste/carbon footprint.</li> </ul>

## RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

A second set of research priorities focuses on strengthening our research infrastructure, fostering a thriving research culture, and ensuring access to the London Collection opening up our assets for use by others. From expanding funding strategies to enhancing staff development and increasing doctoral student engagement, these activities aim to elevate the quality and impact of our research. By fostering a data-driven, collaborative environment and improving access to our collections, we aim to enhance public engagement, broaden knowledge dissemination, and deepen our understanding of the London Collection.

PRIORITY AREA	ACTIVITY	IMPACT
Establishing a new Research Centre – systems and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Develop long term fundraising strategy to support staffing and programme budget.</li> <li>&gt; Explore creation of a research fellowship targeting professionals from non-traditional as well as traditional research backgrounds.</li> <li>&gt; Strengthen our systems for monitoring and evaluating our research projects to the highest standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Secure financial resources needed to sustain and grow our research programmes.</li> <li>&gt; Develop a set of KPIs to identify and measure our research activities and assess the impact of our research.</li> <li>&gt; A diverse range of perspectives is reflected in our research activities.</li> </ul>
Encouraging thriving research culture and increasing numbers of research active staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Create secondment opportunities from museum Content departments into the Research Centre.</li> <li>&gt; Relevant staff have allocated research time to produce peer-reviewed publications.</li> <li>&gt; Encourage more staff to apply for positions on review panels, such as AHRC's Peer Review College. Increase staff participation as reviewers and editors for relevant academic and industry publications, as well as in reviewing grants and PhD theses, and offering expert advice.</li> <li>&gt; Review our Honorary roles with positions to encompass a greater diversity of people and skills in our research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Integrated approach to research and opportunities for staff professional development.</li> <li>&gt; Maintaining our track record for high quality research.</li> <li>&gt; Staff contribute to the evaluation and shaping of research funding decisions.</li> <li>&gt; Honorary roles to complement staff knowledge and experience.</li> </ul>
Growing our cohort of doctoral students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Lead on collaborative doctoral landscape application to diversify funding for collaborative PhD study.</li> <li>&gt; Create a structure to further support existing and future doctoral students, enabling them to share their research more effectively with the public.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Increased research capacity leads to higher quality outputs and influences future research.</li> <li>&gt; Research findings are shared with a wider audience, raising public awareness of important research topics.</li> </ul>

PRIORITY AREA	ACTIVITY	IMPACT
Championing a data-driven and research-based culture across museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Leverage the research data generated through continuous/wide-spread evaluation with our audiences to enhance our onsite and online offers.</li> <li>➤ Undertake learning research to understand and enhance the impact of our schools visits and early years programmes.</li> <li>➤ Generating evidence-based insights on building performance, digital infrastructure and online operations, as museum transitions to 'smart building' operations.</li> <li>➤ Continuing to work with Big Data to enhance our understanding of contemporary London and to create content for the Real Time gallery data stories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Enhanced understanding of our audiences needs that impacts our content.</li> <li>➤ Deeper insight into how our collections can meet the needs of London schools.</li> <li>➤ Research and analysis into data enables opportunity to reduce overall environmental impact.</li> </ul>
Growing capabilities to deliver conservation and heritage science research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Apply for research infrastructure grants to support enhancement of conservation facilities at Smithfield.</li> <li>➤ Identify funding opportunities to improve our heritage science facilities at London Museum Stores.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Higher quality research outputs are produced further elevating the museum's research profile and contributing to innovations in conservation science.</li> <li>➤ Improved facilities can support a wider range of scientific analyses, leading to more in-depth studies of our collection.</li> </ul>
Delivering systematic improvements to enable greater access to the London Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Complete our 'Collections Information Upgrade' project.</li> <li>➤ Explore ways for audiences to share knowledge of the collection, new functionalities of online collection.</li> <li>➤ Improve research potential of bulk archaeology collection to increase access to specialist and non-specialist audiences.</li> <li>➤ Improve access to our world-class osteological collection.</li> <li>➤ Enhance access to our library catalogue (onsite &amp; online).</li> <li>➤ Strengthen research potential of our three archives (Museum Business Archive, Port &amp; River, Sainsbury Archive).</li> <li>➤ Conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of racist, sexist or offensive terms used in our collection management system, initially prioritising our historic photographs collection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improved records and digital access facilitate new discoverers within the collection.</li> <li>➤ Enhanced collections knowledge creates more engaging content/expand online access to broader audience.</li> <li>➤ Interpretation of objects is enriched by multiple perspectives.</li> <li>➤ More scholars will engage with the osteology collection ensuring that research is conducted ethically and responsibly.</li> <li>➤ Improved records enhance visibility and impact of library's holdings in academic community and general public.</li> <li>➤ Museum expands scope and depth of research on these collections leading to a range of research outputs.</li> <li>➤ Improved inclusivity and sensitivity of our public materials and records.</li> </ul>

PRIORITY AREA	ACTIVITY	IMPACT
Ensuring everyone has access to research findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Disseminate key findings from research, for example via blogs, social media artist interventions.</li> <li>&gt; Develop effective strategies for sharing research through a range of channels both in print and online.</li> <li>&gt; Make our research outputs, including peer-reviewed publications, available on open access as much as we possibly can.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Broadening reach of research to a wider audience, including non-academic communities.</li> <li>&gt; Supporting transparency and equity in knowledge dissemination.</li> </ul>
Explore the possibility of developing a MA in Museums and Urban Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Work with HEI partner to scope, design and deliver postgraduate study offer.</li> <li>&gt; Work with partner to attract a diverse cohort of students.</li> <li>&gt; Enable students to contribute to programming and acquire practice-based skills through placements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Improved skills for students wanting to progress to a career in the heritage sector.</li> <li>&gt; Students acquire museum-based skills and experience.</li> </ul>



# DELIVERING THE STRATEGY AND UNDERSTANDING OUR IMPACT

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The implementation of this strategy will be guided by an action plan, with annual deliverables. This plan will remain flexible, adapting to evolving circumstances and organisational needs. The operational responsibility for executing this strategy and associated activities will lie with the Research Steering Group, an internal group set up in 2016 and chaired by the Director of Content and including senior staff from across the organisation.

The Research Steering Group will:

- Develop and implement initiatives to enhance capacity building and knowledge sharing.
- Identify gaps in our research offer and explore opportunities for research collaborations, both within and outside the organization.
- Offer internal peer-review for research proposals and funding applications and serve as an ethics advisory board when required.
- Advocate for research within our organization and promote it externally.
- Establish and maintain a framework of Key Performance Indicators to track the progress and impact of the museum's research outputs and related activities. These will align with our wider approach to our organisational performance and will be shared with the museum's senior management teams.
- Ensure evaluation is built into research projects and monitor the results, using the data and working with all our partners to ensure we are always striving to deliver positive outcomes and to do better through our work.

The museum Academic Panel will hold responsibility for oversight of the strategy at policy level. The panel will receive regular reports on the progress of the strategy and will provide independent advice the museum's Director on the quality and effectiveness of our research strategy.

