

OXFORD UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

# Strategic Plan 2017–2022



Museum of  
Natural  
History



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## Our vision

Using the Museum's collections to advance, communicate and share the sciences of the natural environment with diverse global audiences, by triggering, nurturing and sustaining a lifelong interest in the natural world.





# Strategic challenges

Oxford University Museum of Natural History identifies five over-arching challenges that will define the work that it undertakes, and the ways that it engages with audiences:

## Challenge 1

Connect the Museum's collections with diverse audiences – local, national and global – through innovative and creative engagement and programming, both physical and digital

## Challenge 2

Take a proactive and innovative role to inspire and support diverse new generations of scientists

## Challenge 3

Ensure a continuum of engagement from early childhood through to mature adulthood, and enable a rich and sustained lifelong relationship with the Museum, its collections and the natural sciences

## Challenge 4

Enable society to reflect and make decisions on issues relating to the natural world in an informed, evidence-led manner

## Challenge 5

Support the mission of the University of Oxford and other higher education institutions in relation to research, to object-led learning and to public engagement with research

The following objectives and related action points, set out by theme, will address these strategic challenges over the period 2017 to 2022.



# Public Engagement & Education

The Museum will maintain its sector-leading status as a provider of high-quality education for schools and families, and will expand its provision in the area of adult learning and public engagement with research. The Museum will inspire future generations of scientists and citizens engaged with the natural sciences, and enhance the science capital of its audiences.

## Continue to develop and deliver excellent schools programming that inspires all young people to have curiosity about the natural world

- ♥ Provide excellent, accessible learning sessions for a diversity of schools
- ♥ Develop the Museum's digital learning offer for schools, both in-gallery and online
- ♥ Participate in pedagogic research projects to ensure that Museum practice is informed by research and underpinned by sound data
- ♥ Ensure that the schools programme is tightly integrated with the Contemporary Science & Society exhibition series
- ♥ Enhance participation with Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers and become trusted sources of inspiration and expertise for ITT and CPD in the science curriculum



## Encourage and enable diverse new generations of students to enter science at degree level (Project IMAGOS)

- ♥ Expand schools work with socio-economically deprived communities in the broader region through a combination of outreach, out-of-school clubs and Museum visits
- ♥ Extend the Museum's 'beyond the school day' offer to young people, providing a continuum of access to diverse groups across the ages of 11–18, using a range of science clubs, weekend events and summer schools that are integrated into the British Science Association CREST Awards scheme



- ♥ Enhance the work carried out with Years 7–13 in order to provide increased and equitable secondary school access to high-quality science
- ♥ Ensure that young people are represented in the Museum's creative processes through the youth forum (The Dodo Crew) and similar initiatives

## Enhance the Museum's proactive role in the use of collections in university learning and teaching

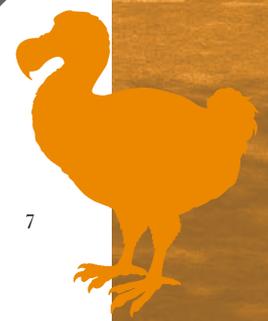
- 👉 Increase the work carried out with Oxford academic departments and other higher education institutions to embed Museum collections and object-based learning in undergraduate and postgraduate courses
- 👉 Seek opportunities to incorporate the collections in additional curricula, collaborate with a wider range of academic departments, and explore the potential for enhancing curricula with digital collections



- 👉 Maintain and seek to expand the internship programme for undergraduates, focussed on public engagement and collections documentation

## Improve the provision for adult audiences

- 👉 Develop the Museum's reputation, both locally and nationally, as a trusted venue where controversial issues involving the natural sciences are discussed and a place where contemporary science and its impacts on society are debated
- 👉 Be proactive as a venue for regular engagement between University researchers and Museum visitors across a range of formats and programming
- 👉 Enhance public awareness of the Museum as a venue where adults can use the collections to increase their skills and knowledge in the natural sciences
- 👉 Sustain varied audience engagement approaches to further diversify audiences, including community outreach to underserved groups such as hospitals, care homes, prisons, probation groups, and homeless shelters
- 👉 Enhance collaborative engagement with adult audiences through the co-curation of exhibitions, events and programmes and effective citizen science projects
- 👉 Maintain a sustainable balance of regular and one-off, small- and large-scale events, working collaboratively across Oxford University Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM)
- 👉 Increase collaborations undertaken with artists, performers and external organisations to enhance creative cultural programming
- 👉 Enrich partnerships with community-led groups, including wildlife and geoconservation groups





## Extend the reach of family programming

- ♥ Develop the family programme to enhance the diversity of Museum audiences, including those with children who have a range of needs and abilities, for example children on the autistic spectrum, or from areas of socio-economic deprivation
- ♥ Enhance the variety of self-guided activities appropriate for all age groups, including digitally-led activities
- ♥ Enhance the programming to assist families in engaging with Contemporary Science & Society exhibitions
- ♥ Deliver family outreach programmes in targeted areas of economic deprivation



Ian Wallman

## Engage audiences with contemporary research



- ♥ Further develop the innovative Contemporary Science & Society exhibition series as a cutting edge mode of public engagement with research
- ♥ Build on and further deepen relationships with University departments in relation to this exhibition series (and associated programming), as a core element of the University's Public Engagement with Research strategy
- ♥ Implement effective data gathering and evaluation to facilitate the development of REF impact activity
- ♥ Develop rich, varied programming that enables engagement with the exhibitions by the widest range of audiences possible, including families and schools as well as adults
- ♥ Implement a programme of pop-up exhibitions and case-level interventions to enable engagement at the level of a single research grant through Pathways to Impact funding and equivalent streams



Ian Walliman

## Implement a programme of renewed interpretation and displays

- 👉 Create an interpretation masterplan and implement a phased redisplay of the main court, with the embedded themes of evolution and human impact on the environment
- 👉 Enhance the Museum website to enable frequently refreshed, richer image and video content, including an online legacy for temporary exhibitions
- 👉 Introduce multilingual interpretation, both physical and digital
- 👉 Develop a touring exhibition programme, with national and international reach
- 👉 Create a seamless continuum of physical content and interpretation, through in-gallery digital, to online content
- 👉 Remove physical and cultural barriers to access wherever they exist

## Instill a data-led culture for evaluation and strategic delivery

- 👉 Evaluate effectively the impact and quality of all learning programmes to ensure the highest quality learning experiences for Museum audiences, and ensure continual improvement in delivery
- 👉 Work with external specialists to implement effective and enhanced data collection systems to enable a full and accurate understanding of the Museum's audiences and their needs
- 👉 Operate a data-led approach to museum programming, the development of innovative activity and the targeting of new and existing audiences

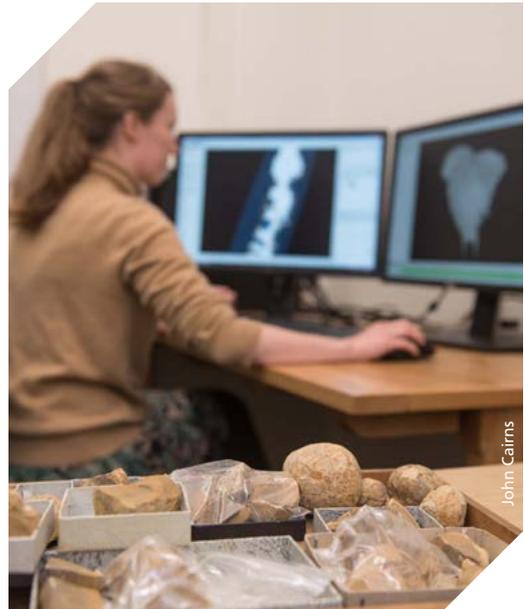


# Research

The Museum will use its collections to sustain internationally leading research on taxonomy and systematics, palaeobiology, biodiversity, conservation and ecosystem services, and Earth systems. It will also be a centre for research into museum pedagogy and object based-learning, conservation science and museology.

## **Continue to develop as a nationally and internationally leading research centre for collections-focussed research within the sciences of the natural environment**

- 🦖 Expand the programme of collections-focused Museum Research Fellowships and increase the number of post-doctoral researchers within the museum, in partnership with cognate academic departments
- 🦖 Maintain a balanced publication strategy between high-profile papers and fundamental studies in taxonomy and systematics
- 🦖 Encourage targeted research on priority collection areas by introducing a visiting fellowship scheme and initiating research projects
- 🦖 Enhance collections-focussed research in the areas of pedagogy, public engagement with research, and collections care
- 🦖 Improve levels of grant income to enable a greater volume of high-quality research



## **Enhance the Museum collections through targeted research-led collecting**



- 🦖 Expand the range of research undertaken and broaden the range of collections areas researched through doctoral and other research projects with diverse external collaborators
- 🦖 Review areas of collecting and active acquisition to ensure that they map to contemporary research agendas
- 🦖 Increase the level of targeted collecting to enrich the Museum's collections and enhance the range of biodiversity research being undertaken
- 🦖 Construct and implement a new Collections Development Policy

# Collections

As a globally leading science museum, the Museum of Natural History will attain and maintain a position at the forefront of best practice in storage, conservation, documentation, public display and access, both physical and digital

## Expand the quantity and quality of digitally accessible collections

- Migrate existing databases currently stored in legacy database formats to the Axiell EMu collections management system
- Migrate existing digitised catalogues that are not currently online
- Digitise all existing analogue collections metadata
- Initiate the digitisation of specimen and archive material directly into the Axiell EMu collections management system
- Enhance and enrich collections access for research and teaching through the development of new and existing digital material with rich metadata, images and digital surrogates
- Develop an accessible research repository for CT-scan data and similar datasets
- Encourage a culture of small- to medium-sized externally funded collections digitisation projects that collectively deliver large-scale digitisation



## Enhance the care and conservation of collections

- Improve the care and conservation of collections through the development of new and/or enhanced storage areas and move away from low-grade offsite facilities
- Rationalise the scope of Museum collections in line with the Collections Development Policy
- Integrate all documentation procedures into Axiell EMu, improving efficiency, security and access of collections information
- Improve the care and conservation of collections on display through the purchase of conservation standard cases and the development of new enhanced storage areas



# Staff and volunteers

The Museum recognises that the maintenance of large collections and high visitor numbers with a high volume of activity is entirely contingent on the maintenance of a stable, highly skilled and highly motivated body of staff and volunteers.

## Develop and sustain a highly skilled and sector-leading workforce

- ✿ Develop and support all staff as effective and recognised leaders in their fields of expertise and support in this endeavour
- ✿ Recognise excellence wherever it lies and enhance through an effective system of staff development, CPD, and other training opportunities
- ✿ Continue to support apprenticeship schemes, and develop innovative opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships across the Museum
- ✿ Embed awareness of equality and diversity across all activities and promote equality of opportunity for all staff, utilising where appropriate the Athena SWAN scheme,



existing OU networks for LGBTQ and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, and the Race Equality Charter

## Enhance participation and develop a fulfilled and diverse body of volunteers

- ✿ Foster a sense of community ownership of the Museum by enabling greater community involvement and decision-making across public engagement activity and collections management via a new community forum and the existing youth forum
- ✿ Work in a mutually beneficial way with all volunteers to make the most of their rich talents and wide experience, and enhance their skills further
- ✿ Strengthen the Museum's links with the University, and between the University and local community, through engagement of University students and staff to help deliver programmes and exhibitions, particularly as a means of learning and honing science communication skills
- ✿ Embed the development of volunteering and community involvement into every bid for project funding where public engagement is a key criterion
- ✿ Commit to increase the number and range of volunteer opportunities to enable inclusive recruitment and increase diversity of the volunteer force
- ✿ Identify volunteer projects for which the museum can recruit inclusively (building on the framework developed through 'Count Me In')
- ✿ Capitalise on the enthusiasm and skills of volunteers to help innovate and increase the capacity to deliver family programmes, adult engagement, evaluation, and collections care



# Leadership and partnership

As a major university museum, there is a responsibility to share expertise and contribute to the development of policy and practice within the sector, as well as assisting the career development of individual professionals in other institutions. The Museum seeks to share its expertise, and learn from the expertise of others, through a variety of strategic partnerships.

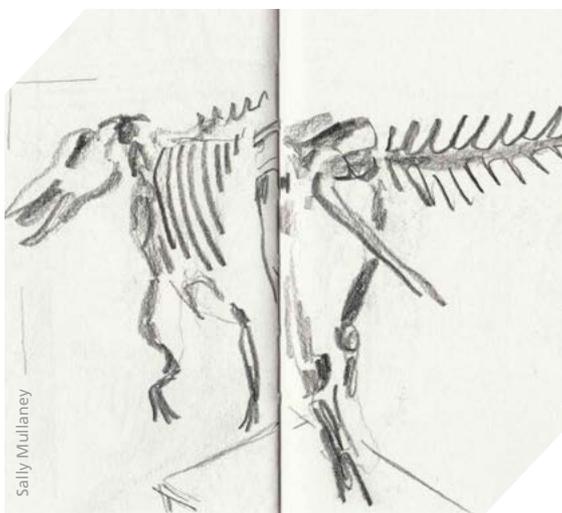
## Take an active leadership role in the sector, particularly in relation to natural science collections

- Establish the Museum as a natural history collections training hub through the implementation of curatorial and conservation traineeships; training days for museum professionals, 'expert amateurs' and community-led groups; and the provision of advice to the sector
- Act as a regional and national centre of excellence for the provision of advice on the documentation, conservation and active use of natural science collections
- Enable staff exchanges with partner institutions to develop and exchange skills
- Maintain an active role in the development and delivery of Oxford Cultural Leaders and other Oxford University Museum Partnership training programmes



- Investigate the use of digital platforms for the delivery of professional training in the curation, conservation and interpretation of natural science collections
- Maintain the internship and work placement programme for undergraduate and postgraduate students from UK HEIs in order to provide early career training and support for the next generation of museum professionals
- Further enhance the Museum's reputation as a sector-leading provider of public engagement and science communication training

## Develop and maintain regional, national and international partnerships



- Continue to develop collaboration and a shared services approach across the Garden, Libraries & Museums division within the University of Oxford
- Provide support for other natural history collections and groups across the region, including the development of an open community library as a common resource for wildlife trusts and other community led groups
- Establish collaborative partnerships with other museums, both nationally and internationally, so that more ambitious, larger scale projects may be undertaken than would be possible within a single institution, and to ensure more diverse reach and enhanced staff skillsets

# Enabling strategies

In order to implement these strategic objectives, the Museum must also address a number of underpinning and enabling factors:

## Improve the Museum infrastructure

- ✿ Continue to refurbish and upgrade the Grade 1 listed building so that it reflects the quality of the collections contained within it and meets the expectations of visitors
- ✿ Collaborate to create new, high specification, shared storage spaces for the collections of the Gardens, Libraries & Museums (GLAM)
- ✿ Continue to monitor and work with Estates to ensure the optimum environmental conditions for audiences/visitors and material on public display
- ✿ Develop an IT infrastructure that supports the strategic plan of the Museum, including online discovery, digital storage and preservation
- ✿ Ensure that open and transparent financial management systems are in place to enable all budget holders to manage their resources in an efficient and effective manner
- ✿ Ensure robust and effective audience data collection and management systems are in place

## Extend and enhance commercial and performance

- ✿ Seek to enhance the levels of retail income from the Museum shop and café
- ✿ Expand the retail offer using existing GLAM e-commerce platforms
- ✿ Increase income levels from venue hire for conferences, dinners and weddings
- ✿ Explore utilisation of the Museum for high profile commercial events in collaboration with existing event promoters
- ✿ Enhance the commercial use of collections (e.g. image reproductions and product development)
- ✿ Develop marketing and publicity activity to match a museum of this quality and ambition across all commercial activity and to reach targeted audiences



## Develop fundraising activity to underpin activity and sustainability

- ✿ Seek to raise endowment, utilising the University's matched contribution scheme, to underwrite key staff posts in a sustainable manner
- ✿ Increase the level of project funding from trusts, foundations and philanthropy to enable new activity and to sustain innovation
- ✿ Seek philanthropic support for key museum interventions, particularly in the areas of digital access and schools education
- ✿ Introduce a patrons scheme for individual and corporate members in order to generate a cohort of long-term supports of the Museum and its activity
- ✿ Improve levels of visitor giving
- ✿ Introduce methods of crowdsourcing funding for the purchase of key acquisitions





Cover Photo: Ian Wallman

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