



University of
St Andrews

Museums strategic plan

Document type	Policy
Scope (applies to)	Public
Applicability date	16/08/2021
Review / Expiry date	18/09/2022
Approved date	02/09/2021
Approver	Director
Document owner	PA to Director & Administration Officer
School / unit	University Library
Document status	Published
Information classification	Public
Equality impact assessment	None
Key terms	Library and museum services
Purpose	To provide the strategic plan for university museums

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
1.0	New document	Draft	Jessica Burdge, Head of Collections	17.8.21

Strategic plan, 2020-25

The University of St Andrews is Scotland's first university, founded in 1413. Like the University, its Museums are rooted in and draw inspiration from this 600-year history of research and teaching, and the pursuit of knowledge for the common good.

Our vision is to reimagine university museums, through curiosity and conversation

The Museums' collections are of national and international interest and importance, and consist of around 115,000 artefacts and specimens reflecting more than 600 years of academic enquiry, creativity and innovation. Among them are three Recognised Collections of National Significance: our Heritage, Chemistry, and Scientific Instruments collections.

The Museums' enduring mission is to steward and share these collections, engaging people everywhere with the intellectual and cultural life of St Andrews.

Museum collections are featured in the Wardlaw Museum and the Bell Pettigrew Museum, stored and studied in a dedicated Collections Centre, displayed across the University, lent for exhibition nationally and internationally, and actively featured and shared online.

2020-2025

The opening of the Wardlaw Museum in 2021 marks the end of the capital project but the beginning of an ongoing transformation of the Museums of the University of St Andrews, inspired by our vision to reimagine university museums through curiosity and conversation.

Everything the Museums of the University of St Andrews do will be created by and with the staff and students of the University, based on and inspired by the research and teaching of the University. In open and collaborative spirit of our origins in the Literary and Philosophical Society we will continue to be a social and cultural hub connecting St Andrews communities with each other and celebrating the distinctive and diverse town that is our home. We convene conversations, share authority, and are a collaborative and respectful team.

2021-25 will see an ambitious programme of exhibitions and programmes in the Wardlaw Museum, as well as early-stage planning towards a reinterpretation of the Bell Pettigrew Museum to engage the public with issues around climate change and biodiversity. The Museums team will work to engage researchers with and students in the Collections Centre, and collaborate with academic Schools and with the other cultural units of the University to enrich the estate through public art and displays across a number of buildings.

Embracing the spirit of enquiry that is at the heart of the University and its research and teaching, we will innovate and experiment, and continuously evaluate our projects and our programmes. We aim not only to raise the profile of the Museums of the University of St Andrews, placing them on a par with renowned University museums such as those at Cambridge, Glasgow, or Oxford, but also to work to establish St Andrews as developing sector-leading practise, to whom other museums look for inspiration and ideas.

Strategic framework and planning context

This strategic plan is based on the University's strategy, 2018-23 (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/about/governance/university-strategy/>) and its Enabling Strategies, which (along with other relevant policies, procedures, and guidance documents) can be found in the University's *Governance Zone* (<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/policy/index.php>).

Development of this strategic plan was interrupted by the Covid-19 crisis, but rather than shrinking from this challenge, this plan places the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis among its key strategic aims, and as a challenge to meet head on and with creativity and determination. While the potential for resource constraints was taken into account in drafting this plan, we have not set out a managed shrinkage of either ambition or impact for the Museums. Instead, this plan articulates growth in reach and impact, so that the Museums maximise their value to, and support of, the University during this recovery period.

Themes and goals

In 2020-25, the Museums will use a framework based on two underpinning strategic themes (set out in more detail in sections 1-2):

- Support the University's recovery from the Covid-19 crisis
- Ensure the impact of our museums and the stewardship of our collections reinforces and reflects their national and international importance

These will be combined with three strategic change programmes (set out in more detail in sections 3-5):

- Tackle institutional legacies and work for a more inclusive and equitable future
- Respond to the climate emergency, and build sustainability into everything we do
- Create greater reach and deeper impact by curating a blended museum experience combining on site programmes with online engagement

Together these five themes will be used to make decisions about what to do, what not to do, and about the relative prioritisation of the Museums team's work. They will support the selection of topics for exhibition topics, help to prioritise projects, and determine where to allocate budget and staff resources. In this planning period, everything must do 1 and 2, and the highest-priority projects and plans will also deliver on at least one of 3, 4 and 5.

Setting out the plan in this way enables us to be ambitious, but also to retain enough flexibility and resilience that if the circumstances change – for better or for the worse – the plan can adapt. Themes 1 and 2 are the core – the elements that will be protected and prioritised, and for which core resources will be allocated. Themes 3, 4 and 5 are areas where additional funding is likely to be required, whether from grants philanthropy or other sources, but these are also the areas with greater potential to accelerate and scale up impact, and to deliver greater and more rapid transformation for the Museums and our work.

1. Support the University's recovery from the Covid-19 crisis

Museums will actively support the University of St Andrews as it – and our town and local communities – recover from the covid-19 crisis. We will do this by:

- Embedding research and research impact throughout our work, developing more robust evaluation and metrics to document these in support of REF and other University needs
- Expanding interdisciplinary research collaborations beyond Arts and Humanities topics, and establishing the Museums team as active and collaborative partners in research projects and programmes
- Making active and growing contributions to teaching and learning, across a range of modules and courses – including reviewing and extending engagement with Museum collections across the curriculum, and co-convening a renewed Museum and Gallery Studies MLitt course
- Supporting student experience beyond academic life, including embedding a student-driven programming approach and establishing an impactful volunteering and skills-building programme
- Putting staff and student wellbeing at the heart of our programming – including launching new programmes based on the five ways to wellbeing, and a new cultural prescription offer
- Maximising our income contribution, including (but not only) through retail and events at the Wardlaw Museum
- Increasing grants and philanthropic support for our work, working closely with the University's Development team
- Deliver increased impact through merging Libraries and Museums, moving towards merged services structures, and later towards a common strategic planning approach and themes

2. Ensure the impact of our Museums and the stewardship of our collections reinforces and reflects their national and international importance

The Museums of the University of St Andrews operate two museums – the Wardlaw Museum and Bell Pettigrew Museum of Natural History, and are responsible for a collection of national and international importance. These are fundamentally collaborative and interdisciplinary spaces, among only a small number of places in the University where staff and students come together across disciplines or schools, and where University and non-University communities come together.

We will work to make our collections more discoverable and accessible, and to increase our impact and reach, by:

- Continuously improving collections management and care, reviewing and reprioritising our collections stewardship plan so that we tackle areas for improvement at scale to accelerate progress
- Seek Recognised Collection status for the University's internationally-important photographic collections
- Develop the capital proposal and case for support for a new Collections Research Centre, opening up more active use of the University's collections for research and teaching, as well as improved collections stewardship for these collections.
- Making judicious and thoughtful acquisitions to ensure University collections are relevant, open, accessible, and active, and to ensure they better reflect the diversity of our University's history and community – including revision of collections development plan, and of lifecycle collections costs model and approach
- Support the Capital Plan by displaying and embedding collections across the University's estate, and supporting excellence in public art and art commissioning
- Establishing the Wardlaw Museum as a visitor-focussed museum, informed by a growing and rigorous audience research and knowledge base that informs our decisions about exhibitions, learning programmes, events, and digital engagement, on site and online.
- Develop plans and seek funding to create in the Wardlaw Museum garden a new art-enriched public space in the heart of the historic town, potentially working in collaboration with the St Andrews Botanic Gardens.
- Inspiring learning in its broadest sense, supporting the University's aspiration to be a beacon for diversity and social responsibility – including reviewing and relaunching Schools programme, with a focus on Widening Participation and Social Responsibility, and developing a new ESOL programme supporting the University's sanctuary status.
- Working collaboratively with the University's cultural units, and other partners, to position Museums and our spaces as a cultural, social and educational hub for St Andrews, empowering diverse audiences to come together, exchange ideas, share experiences, and build community.

3. Tackle institutional legacies and work for a more inclusive and equitable future

We acknowledge that when it comes to tackling inequalities and inequities in our past and present, the most profound change will come not from swift and visible, but ultimately temporary, activity in responsive mode. Instead, we will build questions of diversity and decolonisation throughout our work, and be bold and thorough in how we approach systemic and deep-rooted legacies in our collections and our museums, as well as how we understand their impact today. We will work collaboratively with staff and students to make Museums key spaces for conversation, and for creating positive change towards a more equitable and inclusive future.

This includes:

- Research and university and public engagement tackling legacies of enslavement and empire – including through a major *Recollecting Empire* programme and exhibition, and PhD research (supported by a fully-funded scholarship) on imperial and colonial contexts for the collections at St Andrews
- Convening conversations on gender and sex(uality) – including working with Museum and Gallery Studies students on a display and engagement around the *Beggar's Benison* collection, and the major exhibition *First Women* and its associated programming
- Work to diversify Museums and our staff – including redesigning and relaunching Museum traineeships, and developing future plans for fellowships and skills-development opportunities for people underrepresented in the museums sector workforce
- Develop and diversify the University's collections and displays - including refocussing collecting and acquisitions, and rehanging the University state rooms
- Strengthen cultural property management – including through active provenance research, and refreshed cultural property advice and training for all University work involving objects, artworks, or heritage items

4. Respond to the climate emergency, and build sustainability into everything we do

Longer term than the recovery from Covid-19, but no less urgent, the Museums will work to respond to the climate emergency, and to ensure that our work and programmes are developed and planned with sustainability in mind. In this area, we build on a strong track record – MUSA won environmental and sustainability awards – and we will work to ensure that this success is maintained and extended.

We will support the University's aim to develop students' sense of their environmental leadership, to research, showcase University research on biodiversity, sustainability, and the environment, and champion efforts to reduce our carbon footprint, and to become the UK's first carbon-neutral university.

Museum collections have strength in scientific and natural historical specimens, and we will combine this with academic and research expertise across the University to create exhibitions and programming on themes relating to environment, sustainability, and climate. These will aim to increase knowledge and understanding, but also – and more importantly for our shared future – to spur action and behaviour change.

Sustainability is not only a programmatic theme, but one that impacts choices around how we deliver all projects. We will scrutinise all object loans and travel to ensure that their positive benefits clearly outweigh their environmental impact, assess and reduce the carbon impact of our temporary exhibitions programme, and minimise or eradicate our use of disposable and single-use plastics. We will ensure that decisions about storage, including the specification and design of the proposed new Collections Research Centre place sustainability at their heart, reducing the carbon impact of the environmental controls needed to secure and preserve the collections.

This includes:

- Develop our practise so that exhibitions and programmes promote behaviour change and action – including through major exhibitions *Dive In!* on ocean science to align with COP21 in November 2021, and *Peatlands* on the cultural and scientific contexts for peat around the world, as well as through PhD research (supported by a fully-funded scholarship) on behaviour change in relation to ocean plastics, in museum contexts
- Find new relevance for the Bell Pettigrew Museum, connected with research on biodiversity and ecosystems – starting with quick wins to improve the visitor experience, and expand opening hours
- Audit and be transparent about our internal plans, processes, and procurement, and contribute to the University's carbon net zero goal – including assessing the carbon impact of temporary exhibitions and other Museums work, and setting targets for reduction
- Track our contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

5. Create greater reach and deeper impact by curating a blended museum experience combining on site programmes with online engagement

Dual delivery has been developed in response to the Covid-19 crisis, but it has potential to be a positive development that we will sustain and maintain.

We will weave digital engagement throughout our work not only as a tool for delivery but also as a collaborative opportunity.

Online engagement not only complements and extends our onsite activity, it enables the Museums to have a truly global reach and impact, like the University of St Andrews.

This includes:

- Establish our digital voice, and its relationship to our onsite activity and programmes – including investment in training and digital skills for all Museums staff
- Digital engagement as a collaborative tool for participation and engagement, identifying strengths from digital engagement in lockdown period on which to build, and piloting a new digital learning offer
- Open up digital and digitised collections, working towards closer digital integration with other University collections, and developing new tools to transform access to collections online
- Establish digitisation as part of business as usual workflows

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1.0	New document	Draft	Jessica Burdge, Head of Collections	17.8.21