



COLLECTIONS RESEARCH STRATEGY

2019-2024

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1. Introduction

Collections research is one of the main ways by which the Royal Armouries fulfils its obligations under the National Heritage Act (1983), of *maintaining and exhibiting a national collection of arms and armour*. This is reflected in the Royal Armouries' Corporate Plan and conducting research has been a recognised function of national museums since the mid-19th century.

Internationally recognised collections combined with object-based expertise mean that the Royal Armouries is uniquely placed to have impact in ways beyond those available to universities or other research organisations. Collections research ensures that public benefit is generated from the collection through the creation and dissemination of new knowledge about the objects in the collection, and the Royal Armouries can offer an extraordinary environment in which museum professionals, academics, scientists, makers and practitioners can work collaboratively to develop new approaches to the study and understanding of arms and armour and wider material culture.

2. Purpose

This strategy reaffirms our commitment to supporting research of the highest quality, and ensures that the collection can inspire, inform and challenge our audiences now, and in the future.

The Strategy builds on the Royal Armouries historic strengths and sets out its ambitions for the next five years. It complements the Royal Armouries' policies and strategies relating to collections development and management, digital outputs, partnership working, and public programming, and provides direction to Keepers, Heads of Department and other members of staff – as well as our academic stakeholders.

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3. Priorities

These priorities have been determined following the situational analysis, consultation and benchmarking work undertaken in the Collections Strategy 2019-24:

- a. Quality: There will be an emphasis on highlighting the quality of the research programme and outputs. The Royal Armouries wants to increase the proportion of its research publications that would be recognised by external peers and as making a substantial contribution to the field of arms and armour, including the use of the Royal Armouries *Arms and Armour* Journal. A significant opportunity will be the development and planning of resource, integrating this Strategy's aims with other Royal Armouries' priorities. This will require the setting of clear, realistic goals and deadlines through the planning and line-management process, and the effective monitoring of delivery via the Research Steering Group.

- b. Skills: The Royal Armouries wants to ensure that staff have the appropriate skills and experience and time to develop, deliver and undertake / supervise high-quality research projects. This encompasses the recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled staff, the provision of training, and the proper development and management of research careers, including the recruitment of a Head of Research to oversee this work. Implementing the strategy will require skilled research and financial administration to support the initiation and management of the research register.

- c. Access and Facilities: While the majority of research on the collection will be undertaken by the Collections Department, collections research is open to all. The Royal Armouries will review internal and external applications to undertake research on the collection via a published procedure outlined below in section 7. Provision of analytical equipment, appropriate and

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flexible spaces, and a range of other supporting facilities such as IT, access to the collections, library provision etc. will be needed, either provided by the Royal Armouries or through partnership with Universities and other institutions. This will need to support team-based projects and facilitate research requiring long-term access to large quantities of collections material, and to make provision for visiting researchers and research students. Important aspects of this Strategy will depend on the efficient organisation of, and proper support for the Royal Armouries' library and archives. Sustained access to paid-for online resources, journals and e-books will be essential to the success of this Strategy. Partnership arrangements with local universities will need to be increasingly investigated.

- d. Partnerships: The Royal Armouries will work closely with universities in the UK and internationally as well with other museums and other collecting and heritage organisations to conduct, support and promote collections-focussed research. Where relevant we will involve research recipients, beneficiaries and members of the public in the research process, building on best practice in this area. The aims of the strategy will only be achieved if we work closely with partners, especially universities and museums across the country, building on the MOUs we already have in place and guiding us towards which new MOUs we should be prioritising in the future.

Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships/Awards funded PhD students, and students from further sources will make a specific contribution to delivering the Strategy. Success in a competitive environment requires continuing engagement with the research strategies of our funding consortium partners and Higher Educational Institution research collaborators. Greater attention to the choice of research topics, to supporting students in career-enhancing experiences and ensuring that student research leads to quality outcomes will be necessary to ensure that studentships make a meaningful contribution to overall research areas. With the emergence of collaborative consortia and

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doctoral training partnerships, the changing funding environment for research students is an area where wider research and academic partnerships can be developed and reinforced. We should also investigate the possibility of funding studentships from other sources, and of offering short-term research secondments as part of other institutions' PhDs or other research projects.

- e. Public Programme and Masterplan: Collections research will underpin the development of future permanent galleries and special exhibition programmes, including for the Royal Armouries' Masterplan, through long-term research on the objects in the collection and the history of their makers, users and collectors. The research programme will feed our public events programme across all sites.

- f. Digital: The research programme will contribute to digital outputs, which may include: updating object records for access online; adding content to web pages, blogs and social media; TV programmes etc. The term is left deliberately vague as the mix and variety of outputs will change during the lifetime of this Strategy. As the Royal Armouries' research increasingly uses digital methods and generates large amounts of primary digital data such as that from CT scans, oral histories and material analysis, there will be challenges in terms of technical infrastructure and resources, staff skills, collaborative procedures and the curation of the resulting data. The approach will be to work closely with external digital humanities organisations and university departments in order to ensure that our approach is up-to-date.

- g. Promotion: The Royal Armouries will raise the profile and promote the achievements of its research programme in its public communications and to appropriate stakeholders, supporters and the international research sector. The Royal Armouries will need to find financially and technologically sustainable ways to be open-access and open-data compliant.

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5. Funding

To deliver this Strategy successfully, the Royal Armouries will need to raise adequate external funding to support the programme, with an emphasis on increasing the proportion of external funding that will contribute to other core budget costs.

The Royal Armouries has not yet established a consistent track record of growth in relation to research funding, nor does it yet have Independent Research Organisation Status to obtain funding directly from research councils such as AHRC. The Royal Armouries therefore anticipates needing to look beyond traditional sources of funding, especially into other sectors. Our own resources will need to be targeted towards providing seed funding for this, and also used for essential research which will be hard to fund through other means.

6. Measuring Success

The success of this Strategy will be seen through the quality, type, range and amount of research and funding achieved. It will be primarily visible through the publications that result. The Collections Strategy 2019-24, outlines how the overarching priority of Research and Innovation will be assessed, and that is through collections catalogue entries, the number of internal and external publications and to a certain extent citations.

The Royal Armouries will aim to achieve an annual target of books, exhibition catalogues and peer-reviewed articles or papers written by current Museum staff and Royal Armouries' supported students where these are the result of Royal Armouries' projects. More is not necessarily better in this case. The Royal Armouries will also keep a record of research that is conducted on our collection, and resulting publications and other outputs such as raw data. This includes work by former staff. Lastly, the Royal Armouries will have a fundraising target for research.

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The Royal Armouries will look at measuring the impact that collaboration with organisations beyond the Royal Armouries makes to our research and to the collaborating institutions, including student careers over the next five years.

Although these measures are mainly quantitative, we will also investigate qualitative measures in line with our principal to focus on quality rather than quantity. This may include areas such as: the contribution that research makes to increase the quality of our galleries, exhibitions, public events, digital outputs and publications; and the contribution that it makes to improving how we conserve, document and store the collection.

7. Implementation and Governance

This Strategy will be implemented through the development of a new five-year rolling research plan with priority areas (an initial draft of suggested priority areas can be found in Appendix A). This will contain current and planned research projects mapped against the research areas and measures of success outlined above, and against major projects and public activities in the Corporate Plan and Annual Operating Plan. Currently, all research is logged on the Research Register (see Appendix B).

The delivery of the Strategy will be monitored by the Research Steering Group at its bi-monthly meetings (see Appendix C for Terms of Reference for this Group).

As outlined in the Collections Strategy and Action Plan 2019-24, Royal Armouries' research will be guided by a Code of Research Ethics made available to all staff. This will be regularly updated to be in line with other public sector and research organisations.

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4. Direction

The Director of Collections has responsibility for developing and monitoring overall collections research activity for the Royal Armouries. The implementation of the Strategy supporting this process, external representation and the day-to-day management of research are the responsibility of the new position of the Head of Research and the Research Steering Group. This Strategy is accompanied by supporting procedures and documentation.

All Royal Armouries' research proposals, ongoing work and outputs by research-active staff are approved and monitored by the Research Steering Group (see Appendix D for the procedure for submitting a research proposal). All research is recorded on the Research Register, which is controlled by the Group. Research attainments are reported to Executive Board. The Research Steering Group will properly direct all relevant resources to ensure its reputation can be developed fully, maintaining originality, significance and rigour in research within a framework of the highest standards of infrastructure, training, and integrity. It will encourage open and proactive discussion of how goals can be attained and promote a results-centred ethos/

5. Review

This document will be reviewed annually and updates in corporate policy and plan, legislation and international conventions will be amended or added where relevant.

This document will be reviewed by the Director of Collections and approved by the Director-General and Master of the Armouries.

6. Risk Management

The associated risk of non-compliance with this strategy is:

Impact of non-compliance: High

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Likelihood of non-compliance: Medium

7. Effective date

This strategy is effective from the date of signing.

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Director General & Master of the Armouries

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Appendix A: Research Areas for 2019-24

Following a review of the current research base at the Royal Armouries and given research initiatives in the sector and wider (and following the reviews and consultation undertaken in the Collections Strategy 2019-24), the research areas over the next five years at the Royal Armouries are:

- a. Threat and Response – Understanding the use and effect of arms and armour. For many centuries physical threats to humanity have driven the development of new types of weapon and armour, and changes to materials and manufacturing technologies.
- b. Makers and Collectors – The design, manufacture and status of arms and armour has changed significantly over time, and skilled makers have developed their trade. Similarly, arms and armour collectors from all over the world have built and curated significant collections.
- c. Society – As a literal matter of life and death, arms and armour is strongly reflected in society, art, and popular culture at large, including aspects of folklore, mythology and gender.
- d. The History of the Royal Armouries Collection and its Public Role – The Royal Armouries' Collection has its origins in the middle Ages, with its status and management changing over the years until it was established as a national museum via the National Heritage Act 1983. Its public role in the main has remained constant, with it being one of the oldest British visitor attractions.
- e. Window on the World – The Royal Armouries collection has items from all over the world, with approximately 50% of its Collections originating from other countries outside of the U.K.

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- f. During and Post-Second World War – The Royal Armouries' Collection is very strong on 20th century and contemporary material, yet relatively little formal research has been carried out in this area.

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