



Ethics Policy

Introduction

The Natural History Museum's mission is to maintain and develop its collections, and use them to promote the discovery, understanding, responsible use and enjoyment of the natural world. The British Museum Act 1963 defines a duty to care for the collections and to make them available to the public.

Ethics are an essential part of decision-making and practice in the Museum. For three of the Museum's major roles—as a museum, as a public body, and as a scientific institution—ethical frameworks developed in external sectors are of particular importance both for the institution and for individuals working in and with the Museum.

Beyond this, the diversity of the Museum's activities means that there are a range of other professional and ethical standards and codes that are used to support institutional responsibility and individual professional duty. The ethical environment in which the Museum operates is in a state of constant evolution and requires active consideration and review.

This policy does not set out specific frameworks and codes in detail but rather summarises key principles and commitments. The Museum develops more detailed guidance with reference to external codes in implementing this policy.

Policy and principles

1. The Museum is committed to ethical responsibility both as an institution and on the part of individual members of staff.
2. The Museum should adhere to ethical standards appropriate to public, professional and other functions. It should operate within legal standards in the UK and in other countries in which it operates. Those collaborating with the Museum or in formal association are expected to follow comparable standards.
3. The Museum will be active in consideration and resolution of ethical issues as they arise and in developing appropriate policy, processes and capacities.
4. *Museum values*: we have ethical responsibilities as a museum: some specific to the Natural History Museum and others from broader professional codes¹ that apply across the museum sector in the UK and internationally:
 - a) We should bring benefit by promotion of effective understanding and responsible use of the natural world. To this end we support research, expertise, knowledge, collections, information and engagement, collaborating in the UK and overseas.

¹ In particular, the Code of Ethics of the UK Museums Association
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- b) We have a duty to develop, manage and use the collections for the benefit of current and future generations. We should bring benefit through collections access, use, and development. We should recognise the interests and contributions of countries and communities of origin and those involved in collections' origins and development in the past.
 - c) We should bring benefit from engagement: encouraging the public to understand, be inspired, learn and enjoy the natural world through our collections, information, expertise and engagement;
5. *Public service values*: in common with all those working in public service and holding public office, the Museum refers to the Nolan principles² as a basis for conduct. The following broad principles inform our practice:
- a) We should act with selflessness, solely in terms of the public interest and not in order to gain financial or other material benefits for ourselves, family, or friends. We should avoid using our position for personal gain or to benefit another at the expense of the public or of the Museum, its mission or its reputation.
 - b) We should act with integrity, not placing ourselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence us in the performance of our duties. We should avoid any act which compromises, or which could be seen to compromise our independence and integrity or that of the Museum; and we should take appropriate steps to identify and deal with malpractice and professional misconduct;
 - c) We should be objective in carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, making choices on merit. We should reach conclusions based on the best scientific and professional practice, having considered all views.
 - d) We should be accountable for our decisions and actions to the public, government, funders and partners and to submit ourselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate.
 - e) We should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that we take, giving reasons for decisions and restricting information only when there are justifiable grounds. We should engage with the public to secure effective involvement and communication.
 - f) We should be honest in declaring any private interests relating to our public duties and taking steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest and that of the Museum.
 - g) We should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.
6. *Scientific values*: the Natural History Museum is a scientific institution, founded on the principle that a rational and reliable understanding of the natural world depends upon scientific research—the collection and its information is both a resource for and result of this enterprise to investigate natural diversity. As a scientific institution, and in common with many other organisations involved in science, the Museum is committed to the values of rigour, integrity, trust, openness and verification in all aspects of its science and requires both good practice and conformity with all legal, professional and ethical obligations by

² The Seven Principles of Public Life were first defined in the *First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life* (Cm 2850, 11 May 1995)

staff, students, associates and volunteers. We expect visitors and collaborators to follow similar practice.

- a) We should be honest in all aspects of science, including in the presentation of research goals, intentions and findings; in reporting on research methods and procedures; in gathering and managing data and collected objects and in making them available; in using and acknowledging the work of other scientists; and in conveying valid interpretations and making justifiable claims based on research findings.
- b) We should exercise rigour, in line with prevailing disciplinary norms and standards: in performing research and using appropriate methods; in adhering to an agreed protocol where appropriate; in drawing interpretations and conclusions from the research; and in communicating the results.
- c) We should pursue transparency and open communication in declaring conflicts of interest; in the reporting of research data collection methods; in the analysis and interpretation of data; in making research findings widely available, which includes sharing negative results as appropriate; and in presenting the work to other researchers and to the general public through publications, databases, collections and public engagement.
- d) We should promote leadership, responsibility, good governance and best practice and provide support and training for the development of scientists. We should use transparent, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of scientific misconduct, should they arise.
- e) In working with governments, clients and the public, including the provision of scientific advice and expertise, we should maintain scientific independence and good practice, including appropriate freedom to communicate and publish research findings, data and advice unless there are over-riding reasons for confidentiality.