



**Staff Handbook Section C (Annex F)**

**V&A Research Ethics Policy**

Research Department

Last Updated: February 2015

## **1. Introduction**

This document sets out the V&A's Research Ethics policy for all members of the Museum engaged in research, including staff and students and anyone conducting research under the auspices of the V&A.

The V&A values the ability of its staff to conduct research to the highest standards of professional integrity. This policy sets out the standards of performance and conduct expected of all staff, students and contracted personnel engaged in research at the V&A. It is designed to ensure that research carried out at the Museum is conducted in an ethical and accountable manner. It aims to ensure the delivery of high quality research, to safeguard all stakeholders, to meet the requirements of relevant funding bodies and to manage risk in relation to Research Misconduct.

This policy replaces the V&A's Code of Good Practice. It is based on standard expectations of good practice as outlined by the *RCUK Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct* (2009), Universities UK's *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (2012), our legal requirements, and professional guidance issued periodically from funders and other relevant bodies. It is based on policies already published by UK Universities and Independent Research Organisations, including the University of Oxford and the British Museum.

All Museum staff, students and those contracted to undertake research for the Museum must familiarise themselves with the policy and ensure that its provisions are observed. The Museum will also draw attention to the policy in its induction process for newly appointed researchers. Line Managers and Project Managers have a responsibility to seek to ensure compliance by their staff. V&A co-supervisors of students engaged in research will aim to ensure compliance with the Code by their students; students should refer to this document alongside the Ethics policy of their own university.

Failure to comply with this policy may give rise to an allegation of Research Misconduct (as further defined in Section 5). Research Misconduct is a very serious matter and may require the Museum to take measures including dismissal of the member of staff involved.

**This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:**

- V&A Ethical Clearance Process for Research Projects (section X of the Research Handbook)
- V&A Open Access Policy (section V of the Research Handbook)
- V&A Records Management and Archives Policy (Staff Intranet)
- V&A Safety Policy (Staff Handbook)

## 2. Definitions

**“Research”** is understood to involve original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. This definition includes the following:

- Scholarship: the analysis, synthesis and interpretation of ideas and information.
- Pure Research: work undertaken to acquire new knowledge without a particular application in view.
- Strategic Research: work which is carried out to discover new knowledge which might provide for an envisioned future application.
- Applied Research: work which is undertaken to discover new applications of existing or new knowledge.
- Action Research: the development of new knowledge through engagement in practice.

Within the Museum setting some of the above work takes place within the context of research informing the identification, selection and acquisition of objects into the Museum's collections and exhibitions. Research may also focus on collections, or audiences, or both. Audience research may address (for example), the diversity of audience needs and behaviour; the effectiveness of exhibits, programmes and other public provision; and issues of cultural policy. Research also plays an active part in the conservation, presentation and interpretation of objects in the galleries and is essential in providing appropriate levels of documentation.

All research supports the creation of knowledge whereby information about objects in the Museum's collections is enriched by a broader comprehension of their wider historical context and their social, intellectual, technological and aesthetic significance. The central types of knowledge required by the Museum are the ability to identify and care for objects in the collections and to enhance the interpretation of their meanings for diverse audiences. Members of staff and students must, therefore, maintain a constant dialogue between the objects, archival material and the relevant secondary literatures, between data and methods of care and interpretation, and between the Museum and its users. Audiences may themselves be active researchers, as students, academics, or specialist professionals, as well as informed participants.

**“Researcher”** is understood here as any person who conducts research, including but not limited to: as an employee; as an independent contractor or consultant; as a research student; as a visiting scholar or honorary fellow; or as a member of staff on a joint or honorary contract.

**“Ethics”** is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary Online (2014) as “Moral principles, or a system of these”.

### **3. Overarching Principles of Good Research Practice**

The ‘Nolan Principles’ form the basis of the ethical standards expected of anyone who works as a public office holder, including everyone who works at a non-departmental public body such as the V&A.<sup>1</sup> They are:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

V&A staff and students should adhere to these principles in all aspects of their research. In particular they should:

- Demonstrate integrity and professionalism;
- Observe fairness and equity;
- Avoid, and/or declare, conflicts of interest;
- Ensure the safety and well-being of those associated with the research;
- Observe all relevant legal and ethical requirements; and
- Be open to scrutiny and debate.

Good research practice should also include:

- Securing and storing primary data appropriately;
- Documenting results clearly and accurately;
- Attributing and acknowledging the contributions of others;
- Co-operating with other researchers; and
- Taking special account of the needs of less experienced researchers.

V&A staff and students are also expected to be familiar with the established values and principles shared by the international museum community, including the Museums Association, ICOM and ICON.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Committee of Standards in Public Life, *The 7 principles of public life* (published 31 May 1995) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>>.

<sup>2</sup> See Museums Association, *Code of Ethics for Museums* <<http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>>; International Council of Museums, *Code of Ethics for Museums* <<http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/>>; and Institute of Conservation, *Professional Guidelines* <[http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=121](http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&id=121)>.

## **4. Ethical Standards and Requirements**

All staff at the V&A must conduct their research according to the following standards of good research practice:

### **i. Openness and Attribution**

Researchers will be honest in respect of their own actions in research and in their responses to the actions of other researchers. This applies to the whole range of research work, including designing experiments, generating and analysing data, applying for funding, publishing results, and when peer reviewing the work of other researchers. Researchers will strive to ensure the accuracy of research data and results, and acknowledge the direct and indirect contributions of colleagues, collaborators or other individuals where appropriate.

### **ii. Managing Conflicts of Interest**

Researchers will disclose any potential or actual conflict of interest in research. Such conflicts include (but are not confined to) legal, ethical, moral, financial, personal or academic interests. Potential conflicts of interest include a researcher's personal or familial affiliation to or financial involvement with, any organisation sponsoring or providing financial support for a project they are undertaking. Financial involvement includes direct personal financial interest, receipt of personal benefits (including travel and accommodation) and receipt of material or facilities for personal use.

Any perceived conflict of interest must be disclosed to your Head of Department or line manager, who will determine what further action should be taken. Further disclosure may need to be made to other key Museum staff and/or completion of a register of interests.

Where it is unavoidable that a purchase is made from a company in which a researcher has a direct or familial financial interest, the researcher is required to disclose that interest to their line manager, with reference to the Head of Research, and will be barred from authorising the purchase him or herself.

### **iii. Confidentiality**

In general, research requires openness, but restrictions relating to publication and dissemination may apply in circumstances where the Museum or its partners have made or given confidentiality undertakings to third parties or confidentiality is required to protect intellectual property rights. It is the duty of the researcher to enquire of their relevant Project Manager, with reference to the Head of Research, as to whether confidentiality provisions apply and of the Project Manager and/or Head of Research to inform researchers of their obligations with respect to these provisions.

#### **iv. Professional Standards**

Researchers will take all reasonable measures to comply with ethical and legal obligations as required by statutory and regulatory authorities, including seeking ethical review and approval for research when appropriate. This applies to the whole range of research work including methodological planning, generating and analysing data, publishing results and acknowledging the contribution of others. They will ensure that any research undertaken complies with any funder terms and conditions relating to the project.

Researchers will follow the requirements and guidance of any professional bodies in their field of research. Researchers who are members of a regulated profession<sup>3</sup> will also follow the specific requirements and guidance of the body regulating their profession.

#### **v. Purchasing and expenditure for research**

Purchasing and other expenditure of funds should take place in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Museum's financial regulations and staff Code of Conduct and of any grant or contract held for research.

#### **vi. Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data or Human Remains**

All research projects involving human subjects or participants, personal data, or human remains must be approved under the V&A's Ethical Clearance Process for Research Projects before data gathering commences. Approval will also be sought from other regulatory bodies as necessary.

##### Human Participants

Researchers will ensure that all participants in a research project understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used. Participation should be based on the freely given, informed consent of those studied and participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation for any reason. Researchers will always strive to protect the rights of those they study, their interests, sensitivities and privacy.

##### Personal Data

Researchers will at all times ensure that personal data is processed lawfully and in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act (1998) and Human Rights Act (1998).

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<sup>3</sup> A regulated profession is one where access to or practice of a profession is restricted by national law to those holding specific qualifications.

## Human Remains

Researchers will ensure that human remains are treated in accordance with the Human Tissue Act (2004) as well as other regulatory and professional guidelines. This policy follows the definition of human remains as used in the DCMS *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*.<sup>4</sup> Within the V&A collections, this includes but is not limited to osteological material (for example bones or fragments of bone and teeth). Frequently, these remains have been modified by human skill and/or bound-up with other non-human materials. Some items in the V&A collections incorporate human hair and nails. In line with The Human Tissue Act, hair and nails are not considered to meet the formal definition of human remains, however V&A researchers will recognise that these may be of sacred importance to particular communities and therefore require sensitivity of approach.

## **vii. Training and leadership**

Senior researchers and managers should create an environment of mutual cooperation in which all researchers are encouraged to develop their skills and in which the open exchange of ideas is fostered. They must also ensure that appropriate direction of research and its supervision are provided through normal project management procedures, mentoring and the Museum's Performance Management scheme. All researchers should ensure that they have the necessary skills and training for their field of research.

## **viii. Data**

Research data must be recorded in a durable and auditable form, in accordance with the Museum's Records Management and Archives Policy, so that it can readily be discovered. It must be retained intact for a period of at least five years from the date of any publication, gallery scheme or exhibition which is based upon it (Staff Handbook part 3). It is the duty of the principal investigator to comply with the Data Protection Act, and to ensure that copyright is not breached in line with the guidelines laid down in the Staff Handbook (section E1).

## **ix. Research Outputs**

Outputs arising from research may include books, articles, lectures, web content, galleries or exhibitions. All outputs must report research accurately and with appropriate references to the contribution of all contributors.

## **x. Submitting research funding applications**

Principal Investigators will take all reasonable measures to ensure the accuracy of information contained in applications for funding. Any research projects involving V&A staff or students must go through the V&A's Ethical Clearance Process for Research Projects (section X of the Research Handbook) before the research can begin.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Culture, Media and Sport, *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (published 2005) <[www.culturalpropertyadvice.gov.uk/public\\_collections/human\\_remains](http://www.culturalpropertyadvice.gov.uk/public_collections/human_remains)>.

## **5. Research Misconduct**

Researchers must not commit any act of Research Misconduct. This is defined as non-compliance with the Museum's Research Ethics Policy and includes, but is not restricted to:

- Plagiarism - the copying or use of ideas, data or text without permission or acknowledgement.
- Fraud - deliberate deception, involving the invention of data or the fabrication of results.
- Collusion - aiding or attempting to aid, or obtaining or attempting to obtain aid from another person in an examination, and aiding in the concealment of research misconduct by others.
- Interference - intentional damage to, or removal of, the research-related property of another.
- Non-compliance - the deliberate failure to comply with obligations to the Museum, sponsor, funding body, professional body or partner, including accounting requirements, ethics, and health and safety regulations.

Research Misconduct is a highly serious disciplinary matter. It does not include honest error or honest differences in the design, execution, interpretation or judgement in evaluating research methods or results; or misconduct unrelated to the research process.

All members of the V&A have a responsibility to report Research Misconduct, where they have good cause to believe it is occurring. Members should report an allegation to their line manager, with reference to the Head of Research. The Museum will investigate allegations or complaints about Research Misconduct in line with the disciplinary procedures laid down in the Staff Handbook (section C1 and F2), and with due regard to the obligations placed on the V&A by any third party(ies) or the law.

Suspicions reported in confidence and in good faith will not lead to disciplinary proceedings against the person making the complaint. However, in the event of a frivolous, vexatious and/or malicious allegation the Museum may consider recommending that action be taken against the Complainant.

Prior to making any formal allegation, sources of advice and support for V&A members include:

- Fellow researchers and colleagues
- Research Grants Manager
- Supervisors
- Mentors
- Heads of Department or Section
- Head of Research