



Code of Ethics

Document Control

Policy owner: Director

Approved by: Board of Trustees

Effective from: 01/04/2026

Review date: 01/04/2029

Version: 1.0

1. Purpose

The Natural Sciences Museum, Sheffield (“NSM”) exists to advance public benefit through the preservation, research, interpretation and sharing of natural science collections, knowledge and heritage.

This Code of Ethics sets out the standards of conduct expected of all those acting for or on behalf of NSM. Its purpose is to:

- protect the integrity and reputation of NSM;
- support sound and consistent decision-making;
- promote trust among the public, partners, donors, researchers and funders;
- guide behaviour where legal, professional or ethical questions arise; and
- ensure that NSM’s work is carried out in a way consistent with its charitable purposes and responsibilities.

2. Scope

This Code applies to all:

- Trustees;
- the Director;
- Heads of Department;
- staff;
- volunteers;

- students, interns and associates;
- contractors and consultants working on behalf of NSM; and
- others authorised to act in NSM's name.

All such persons are expected to comply with this Code alongside NSM's governing document, policies and procedures, and all applicable law.

3. Ethical Framework

NSM adopts the following core ethical principles, adapted from the Natural History Museum, London's Code of Ethics framework:

- responsibility and integrity;
- accountability and transparency;
- intellectual freedom;
- respect; and
- sustainability.

These principles apply across all areas of NSM's work, including governance, collections, research, public engagement, fundraising, procurement, partnerships, employment and financial stewardship.

4. Responsibility and Integrity

NSM will act with honesty, fairness and integrity in all its work.

Those acting for NSM must:

- act in good faith and in NSM's best interests;
- avoid conduct that may compromise, or appear to compromise, their judgment;
- not misuse their role, authority, information or access;
- not seek personal gain or advantage through NSM's activities;
- act professionally and conscientiously; and
- take responsibility for the consequences of their actions and decisions.

NSM expects all work to be carried out fairly and ethically, including research, collecting, collections management, procurement, partnerships and public engagement.

5. Accountability and Transparency

NSM will act openly and be accountable for its decisions, use of resources and stewardship of collections and information.

Accordingly, NSM will:

- make decisions at the correct level of authority;
- keep appropriate records of significant decisions and actions;
- provide reasons for decisions where appropriate;
- manage resources responsibly and for proper purposes;
- be open with stakeholders except where confidentiality, privacy, security or legal duties require otherwise; and
- support scrutiny, review and learning.

Those acting for NSM must be prepared to explain and justify decisions taken in their role.

6. Intellectual Freedom

NSM supports honest inquiry, critical thinking, evidence-based research and the responsible sharing of knowledge.

NSM will:

- maintain the integrity of its research, interpretation and public communications;
- support freedom to investigate, question and discuss evidence within lawful and professional boundaries;
- resist improper influence over scientific, curatorial, educational or interpretive content;
- distinguish clearly between evidence, interpretation, opinion and advocacy; and
- present knowledge responsibly, acknowledging uncertainty where it exists.

No person acting for NSM should knowingly misrepresent evidence, suppress relevant information improperly, or distort research, collections information or interpretation for personal, political, commercial or reputational convenience.

7. Respect

NSM will treat people, collections, communities and the natural world with care and respect.

This includes respect for:

- colleagues, volunteers, researchers, visitors, partners and contractors;
- different backgrounds, experiences, beliefs and perspectives;
- lawful equality, dignity and inclusion;
- the cultural, historical and scientific significance of collections;
- sensitive materials, including human remains where held;
- source communities and stakeholders connected to collections or research; and
- the welfare of living organisms and the wider natural environment.

Bullying, harassment, discrimination, victimisation or abusive behaviour are not acceptable under any circumstances.

8. Sustainability

NSM recognises that ethical conduct includes responsible stewardship of environmental, financial and institutional resources.

NSM will seek to:

- use funds prudently and in line with its charitable purposes;
- minimise unnecessary environmental harm;
- consider long-term impacts in decision-making;
- support sustainable collections care, procurement and operations; and
- balance immediate needs with long-term stewardship of collections, knowledge and public trust.

Sustainability at NSM includes environmental responsibility, financial resilience and the long-term safeguarding of the collections and mission.

9. Acting in the Best Interests of NSM

All Trustees and all others acting on behalf of NSM must act in the best interests of the museum and its charitable purposes.

This means they must:

- place NSM's interests above personal or external interests when acting in their NSM role;
- make balanced, informed decisions;
- consider long-term consequences as well as short-term pressures;
- avoid conflicts of interest and conflicts of loyalty; and
- declare relevant interests promptly and fully.

For trustees in particular, this reflects the Charity Commission's guidance that trustees must act only in the charity's best interests and manage conflicts properly.

10. Conflicts of Interest and Personal Benefit

Any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest must be declared as soon as it arises.

No person may:

- take part in a decision where they are conflicted, unless properly authorised under NSM procedures;
- use their position to secure an improper benefit for themselves, family, friends or connected organisations; or
- allow external relationships, loyalties or interests to compromise their judgment.

All gifts, hospitality, sponsorship and benefits must be handled in accordance with NSM's Gifts and Hospitality Policy and any related conflicts procedures.

11. Collections and Research Ethics

NSM will manage collections, collecting, research and access ethically, lawfully and responsibly.

This includes commitments to:

- lawful and ethical acquisition, retention, use and disposal;
- proper documentation and stewardship;
- due regard to provenance and collecting history;
- ethical research practice and respect for evidence;
- proper acknowledgment of NSM collections in research outputs;
- fair recognition of contributions by museum personnel;
- responsible management of human remains, sensitive material and hazardous collections; and
- careful consideration of community, cultural and scientific interests.

Research carried out using NSM collections must support integrity, transparency and responsible knowledge-sharing.

12. Public Engagement and Communications

NSM will communicate honestly, responsibly and respectfully.

Those acting for NSM must:

- avoid knowingly misleading statements;
- not present personal opinions as official NSM positions unless authorised;
- take care when speaking publicly in a professional capacity;
- use images, stories and interpretation responsibly and sensitively; and
- ensure communications are consistent with NSM's values, evidence base and legal obligations.

13. Fundraising, Sponsorship and Partnerships

NSM will seek support and work with external parties only where doing so is consistent with its charitable purposes, independence and reputation.

NSM will not enter into fundraising, sponsorship or partnership arrangements that would:

- compromise its independence or integrity;
- create an improper obligation;
- undermine public confidence;
- conflict with its mission or values; or

- expose the museum to unacceptable ethical, legal or reputational risk.

Any significant or sensitive partnership must be considered with appropriate due diligence and approval.

14. Use of Resources and Information

NSM resources, including money, collections, facilities, systems, data, intellectual property and staff time, must be used only for proper museum purposes unless authorised otherwise.

Confidential, personal or sensitive information must be handled lawfully and appropriately. No one may misuse museum information, collections data or privileged access for personal gain or unauthorised purposes.

15. Workplace Conduct

Everyone working for or with NSM is expected to contribute to a safe, respectful and professional environment.

This includes:

- treating others with courtesy and fairness;
- following health and safety requirements;
- raising concerns responsibly;
- supporting lawful equality and inclusion;
- not tolerating bullying, harassment or discrimination; and
- behaving in a way that protects NSM's reputation and working culture.

16. Raising Concerns

Anyone acting for NSM who becomes aware of suspected misconduct, unethical behaviour, serious policy breach, fraud, corruption, unsafe practice, abuse of authority or other serious concern must raise it promptly through the appropriate channel.

NSM will seek to ensure that concerns raised in good faith are taken seriously and handled appropriately.

17. Governance and Responsibilities

NSM's authority structure is:

Trustees → Director → Heads of Department → staff

17.1 Trustees

The Trustees are responsible for approving this Code and setting the ethical tone of the organisation.

17.2 Director

The Director is responsible for implementing this Code, ensuring it is understood across NSM, and reporting significant ethical issues to the Trustees.

17.3 Heads of Department

Heads of Department are responsible for promoting this Code within their departments, supporting staff to apply it, and escalating concerns where necessary.

17.4 Staff and others acting for NSM

All staff and others acting for NSM are responsible for understanding this Code, applying it in practice, and seeking advice where an ethical issue is unclear.

This mirrors the governance approach signalled in NHM's published code, where board-level oversight sits above departmental responsibility for promoting the code in day-to-day practice.

18. Relationship with Law and Other Policies

This Code does not replace legal obligations or other NSM policies. It should be read alongside all applicable law and relevant NSM policies, including those on:

- conflicts of interest;
- gifts and hospitality;
- procurement;

- expenses;
- collections governance;
- collections development;
- collections access;
- collections care;
- human remains;
- equality and dignity at work;
- safeguarding;
- data protection; and
- whistleblowing or reporting concerns.

Where this Code and another policy overlap, both must be followed.

19. Breach of the Code

Failure to comply with this Code may result in:

- advice, training or corrective action;
- withdrawal of delegated authority or access;
- disciplinary action;
- termination of volunteer, contractor or other arrangements;
- referral to the Director or Trustees; or
- referral to external authorities where required.

20. Review

This Code takes effect on 01/04/2026 and will be reviewed by 01/04/2029, or earlier if required by changes in law, guidance, governance arrangements or operational need.