

# Pitt Rivers Museum

## Public Engagement with Research Strategy

### 2018 – 2021



## Vision

To create an exceptional environment in which to conduct sector leading Public Engagement with Research (PER), working with researchers from disciplines across the University of Oxford (OU), and beyond, using cutting-edge research to activate the collections in new ways, developing PER partnerships and interventions to engage, inspire and consult with our varied audiences. PER will mutually benefit the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), our research partners and our audiences facilitating inspiring and empowering experiences for all partners. PER undertaken at PRM will enable researchers to disseminate the findings of their work in innovative ways by working in partnership with our skilled Collections, Research and Engagement teams; consult with and listen to diverse public views; and support researchers and the public to work together to define future research direction, policy or implementation of research outcomes. PER will help PRM reach key goals laid out in our Strategic Plan, working collaboratively with researchers and the public to challenge the often-difficult histories represented within the Museum. We will shape PER as a central driver of research excellence, inclusivity and collective reflection, bringing high-quality research and publics together to reflect on, and question, wider societal issues that are represented in the PRM collections and in research being undertaken across the UK and internationally.

# Public Engagement with Research

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement with Research (NCCPE) outlines PER as:

*'the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with a goal of generating mutual benefit'.*

PER in the context of OU describes the ways of engaging members of the public with the design, conduct and dissemination of research. The 'public' may be at a regional, national or international level and may range from museum visitors and community groups through to multi-national businesses. PER can be life changing but does not have to be – PER can come from a spark of inspiration or a discussion that involves people beyond the research group. Engagement can happen through various formats, ranging from written publications and digital media, through to face-to-face interventions including workshops, exhibitions and roundtables. The possibilities for 'doing PER' are endless and to conduct PER well necessitates ongoing innovation in the way in which PER is designed, conducted and evaluated.

## Guiding Principles

- **Innovative:** Bringing research to life by inspiring researchers and the public to come together in new, engaging and thought-provoking ways
- **Reciprocal:** Facilitating mutually beneficial dialogues and connections between researchers, publics and PRM
- **Ethical:** Listening to and learning from our stakeholders (including PRM colleagues, external researchers and the public) and ensuring publics engaged understand *why* they are being engaged, have the space to comment, feedback and self-select
- **Sustained:** Building sustained, long-term relationships between researchers, the collections and PRM target publics with PER positioned as a central component of research applications and not as a token
- **Connected:** As well as connecting with researchers and the public, connecting to the *OU PER Strategic Plan*, the *PRM Strategic Plan*, *PRM Research Plan*, *PRM Public Engagement Plan* and the strategic priorities of key funding bodies

## Overview

PRM has a well-established tradition of connecting the exceptional collections that it looks after with researchers and target publics, having delivered innovative PER in partnership with researchers and external stakeholders for many years. However, there has not always been the ambition, funding or opportunity to connect all research taking place within and around the collections (be that research led by internal-research staff, researchers from the wider OU, or non-OU researchers) with public audiences: the research being undertaken has not consistently been leveraged to 1) **inform and inspire the public**; 2) **consult and listen to public views**, or 3) **collaborate with the public** – the three purposes of PER as defined by OU. Due to changes in the PRM's own institutional objectives and due to the increasing importance put on PER by higher education funders, we now need to formalise our

approach and work harder to embed a culture of PER across the Museum and raise awareness of the PRM as an engaged, connected and enquiring PER partner across the wider University.

We recognise the need to set up a sustainable structure for PER that will lead to a more strategic and measurable approach to developing partnerships and projects. This strategy sets out the vision for PER at PRM and identifies key steps to achieving this vision and makes a number of recommendations.

As outlined in *OU PER Strategic Plan*, PER refers to a wide range of ways of engaging members of the public with the design, conduct and dissemination of research. At the PRM we will focus on developing 1) **collaborative approaches** (e.g. involving members of the public effected by the issues being studied as active research collaborators); 2) **consultative approaches** (e.g. seeking public views on research findings or forecasts); and 3) **informative approaches** (e.g. reaching new public audiences through various forms of media or events).

PRM is uniquely placed to help researchers maximise the social impact of research through public engagement. We have exceptional skills in-house from which PER partners can benefit from, with a skilled team of Engagement professionals, as well as world-class researchers experienced in conducting their own PER activities. We will communicate the benefit of working with PRM and make it easier for potential partners to realise the ways in which they can collaborate with PRM. By working with us researchers will gain access to the 400,300+ 'general visitors' that come into the Museum site annually, and the 1.2 million digital visitors from 99% of the world's countries and regions via our website, as well as the access to under-represented groups with whom our Engagement teams have built strong and sustained relationships.

The PRM PER Strategy speaks to 1) the *University of Oxford: Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan*; 2) *PRM Strategic Plan 2017-2022*; 3) *PRM Research Plan 2017-2018*; and 4) *PRM Public Engagement Plan 2018-2019*.

## Strategic Priorities

1. **Making more of what we already do**
2. **Seeking new connections and bringing in new voices**
3. **Creating a culture to support PER excellence**
4. **Improving how we communicate**
5. **Bringing research to life and driving innovation**
6. **Sustainability through long-term relationships**
7. **Evaluating impact**

# Objectives

## **Making more of what we already do**

PRM already works with an incredible portfolio of researchers (from within PRM, wider OU, other UK HEIs and international scholars). Many connections out into OU research departments already exist. However, little PER comes out of these connections. We now need to generate PER activity from the connections we already have and from existing collections research.

- PER activity will be developed around ongoing internal projects. Staff will be encouraged to think about PER from the outset of any new project's development with the senior management team championing this change in working practice. The new Displays and Related Programming Committee will take an active lead to ensure PER happens around research-led displays.
- The Research Associates Scheme will be rethought and those already affiliated with PRM through this scheme will undertake an annual PER activity. The Head of Research and Research Team will take steps to grow this scheme (*PRM Research Plan*)
- All members of the research team will be required to do at least one PER activity a year (*PRM Research Plan*). The Research Team consists of all research active museum staff who publish academically, as well as the PER Officer.
- The Museum's annual flagship public event, Pitt Fest, will be restructured to become a showcase day for the research activities taking place at PRM. Research Active PRM departments will present an activity and the event will be an opportunity for staff members who do research in their roles but aren't on the academic research team to take an active role in PER. Key partnerships with researchers external to PRM will also be highlighted at this event.
- We will ensure that elements of PER inform PRM's two annual block-buster style late night events.
- Social media will be used to share more information about research activity happening at, and in partnership with, PRM, helping us to reach our large digital audience.
- The research pages of our website will be rethought to better highlight PER (*PRM Research Plan*)
- We will make more of our existing OU research connections by reaching out to our contacts and exploring ideas for PER together.
- PRM has excellent connections out into the community and is known for co-creative approaches. In the initial stages of PER development, community contacts will be called upon to consult on developing best practice models for PRM/Research/Community partnerships.

## **Making new connections and bringing in new voices**

Through PER we will build connections with new disciplines, researchers and target publics, bringing these additional voices into the Museum and creating multivocal responses to the collections.

- We will bring researchers, PRM staff and external stakeholders together to engage in dialogue using the collections as a catalyst, connecting people and generating discussion.

- We will support researchers to activate the collections in new ways, be this via temporary interventions such as events and displays, or through the development of more permanent resources such as films, podcasts and webpages.
- We will work with the new voices coming into the Museum to enliven how we present the PRM's programming lines, enriching interpretation as we bring in additional perspectives and expertise.
- We will use the PRM programming lines to connect with new researchers and new publics. We will then work to bring these new research and public connections into dialogue, facilitating collaboration to define future research direction, policy or the implementation of research outcomes (*OU PER Strategic Plan*).
- We will connect with researchers from disciplines across OU, building on long-established relationships within the Social Sciences Division, and moving beyond to areas such as Humanities and Medical Sciences (*PRM Strategic Plan*).
- We will prioritise the development of projects to engage specific target groups rather than those that set out to engage 'general audiences'. This will enable us to tailor activity to a group's specific needs while supporting PRM ambitions to engage with under-represented groups.

## Creating a culture to support PER excellence

We will strive to become a space known for PER excellence, attracting collaborations with world-class research teams. To achieve this, we will develop a culture across PRM that values PER as an essential and beneficial activity. While the PER Officer will lead on development, staff from across PRM will need to support activity and act as ambassadors for PER.

- We will align PRM objectives with the OU PER agenda while ensuring we carve out an innovative niche that supports PRM to achieve our own strategic research and engagement goals.
- We will be collaborative and consultative in our approach. We'll ensure that PER is shaped to engage publics in reciprocal, mutually beneficial dialogues, avoiding didactic models.
- We will position PER as a central component of research activity, ensuring that it is not seen as an 'add-on'. PER will be built in from the start of all internal funding applications and any application in which PRM features as a partner. The PER Officer will be engaged from the start of any application process so that they can advise on and support the development of PER activity from the outset.
- We will work with staff across departments to develop skills and confidence in the development, delivery and evaluation of PER projects.
- We will evaluate PER development with PRM colleagues, research partners and the public and act on feedback.

## Improving how we communicate

We recognise the need to be proactive in how we engage research partners and clear in how we communicate opportunities for developing PER activity with us. We will communicate the benefits of doing PER at PRM, including not only the opportunity to access exceptional collections, and also the opportunity that partnering with us presents to connect with our diverse and substantial physical and digital audiences. We will promote PRM as an active and engaged research partner, and not simply a support service or host venue for PER.

- We will clearly communicate the kind of collaboration we seek, promoting PRM as a *partner* to plan research activity with.
- A PER portal will be created and added to the PRM website. PER case studies will be hosted, along with information on how to connect with PRM to develop new PER activity. The PRM programming lines will be explained, with it made clear that we particularly welcome partnerships that will help us consider these themes. This portal will act as an advert for PER at PRM.
- A PER ‘menu’ of costs will be created, enabling us to communicate the funding required to undertake PER activity.
- The Research Team will advocate for PER at PRM, identifying departments we would like to approach, reaching out to them proactively and promoting the opportunity to work with us.
- We will be proactive about sharing the lessons we learn, hosting workshops to share our methodology, communicating via the PER area of our website, and speaking at relevant sector events.
- We will use social media to showcase PER activity happening at PRM and to make new connections.

## **Bringing research to life and driving innovation**

PER at PRM will bring research to life, activating themes and concepts represented within the collections in new and exciting ways. The PRM is celebrated for its co-creative approach to community engagement: we support community partners to be decision makers and have a say about how outputs are shaped, working in collaboration with staff. We will innovate by supporting research partners to work within this framework to collaborate and co-create with our community stakeholders.

- We will partner with researchers who will use their research to shed new perspectives on the PRM’s collections.
- We will support public engagement in research and prioritise opportunities for PER that directly engages with the PRM’s target audiences as co-researchers or co-creatives in innovative new ways.
- Where possible we will adopt co-creative approaches to developing PER, with our audiences supported to engage with the design, conduct and dissemination of research (*OU PER Strategy*)
- We will develop opportunities for researchers to co-create outcomes with audiences, generating new ideas and perspectives about the research and the collections.

## **Sustainability through long-term relationships**

We will foster long-term partnerships that will lead to collaborative funding applications that will enable us to achieve PRM’s strategic priorities in partnership with researchers. We will develop long-term relationships with our audiences bringing target groups along with us as we continue to develop PER models and innovate.

- We will work with our partners to ensure that PRM is written in as a research/PER partner from the start of any application process. We will work to ensure that funding for PER is not a tokenistic inclusion in grant applications, but a key process and/or outcome of research.
- We will partner with researchers with a view to PRM featuring in a wide range of impact case studies (ICS) in REF2021 and work with colleagues across GLAM to explore how ICSs

may financially benefit both the Units of Assessment and PRM where any submitted impact takes place.

## **Evaluating impact**

Evaluating a project well is crucial to the development of high-quality PER and critical to attract further funding. Going forward we will build the evaluation of impact into all PER work from the outset, ensuring that evaluation is acknowledged as a key component of any PER collaboration.

- We will measure the impact of a project on the publics engaged, the research, and the PRM, analysing evaluation as we go and using feedback to reshape approaches.
- We will prioritise projects with the highest impact potential and shape PER interventions to yield measurable impact. For example, smaller, sustained engagements for target publics that may lead towards the development of an exhibition will be prioritised over large-scale events for general audiences where impact can be expected to be superficial.
- We will develop an evaluation toolkit, drawing on the evaluation models used currently across OU and beyond, and provide training support so that the toolkit can be used effectively.
- We will build an evaluation plan into all projects

## **Review**

This strategy will be reviewed by the Executive Board, Public Engagement and Research Teams annually.