



# Research Strategy 2025–2030



NATIONAL  
TRUST *for*  
SCOTLAND

## Our Research Vision & Strategy

The National Trust for Scotland is a unique organisation. We manage and care for all forms of heritage – natural, built, cultural and intangible – across the whole of Scotland, from mountains and islands to historic houses and castles. We work as a conservation charity, as a museum and gallery, as an advocate for heritage, and as an operator of tourist attractions, holiday homes, food and drink outlets, retail and events venues. Largely funded by our members and donors, we are independent of government and free to speak up for heritage in all its forms. As a complex organisation engaged in a wide range of activities, we need research and innovation to effectively fulfil our charitable purpose.

It is recognised that research is vital to Scotland's future success. The Scottish Government aims to maintain and grow science and research to 'create a more educated, inclusive and innovative Scotland'. The Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance highlights the 'valuable contribution of Scottish Arts and Humanities to our social, cultural and economic advancement'. Scotland has some of the best research universities in the world, and a long tradition of producing innovations that have improved all our lives.

In this context, the Trust has both an opportunity, and a duty, to support, contribute to and benefit from research. This Research Strategy, the first in our 90-year history, outlines why and how we will achieve this through building our capabilities to do, enable and manage research, while creating a culture within the organisation that values and supports research activity.

We are keen to develop our partnership working with universities in Scotland and beyond, where the Trust's places, people and expertise can contribute to research addressing societal challenges and innovation in the practice of conservation. In this way, we can help to fulfil our vision of Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone and continue to care for Scotland's special places for future generations.



**MICHAEL TERWEY**  
Director of Public  
Engagement and Research

Left: Informed by evidence uncovered by Trust archaeologists, we have recreated this turf and creel house at Glencoe

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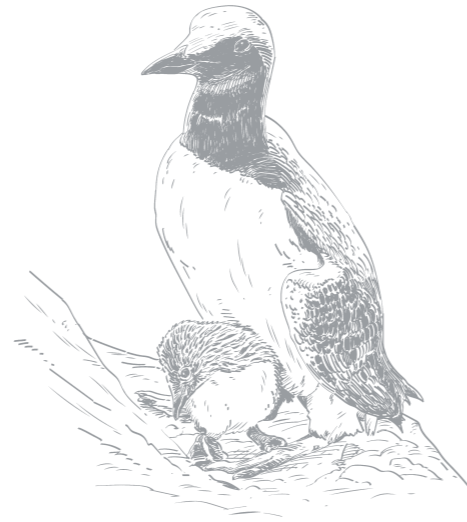
## 1. Definition

Research is an activity that generates new knowledge and insights. It is characterised by the systematic, rigorous and objective study of a subject. Research may be undertaken in different disciplines: in the sciences, in the humanities and in the arts.

**At the Trust, research falls into four broad categories:**

1. Into the value of the things that we have (i.e. significance and Heritage Values)
2. Into the ways that we protect them (i.e. conservation activities)
3. Into the ways that people interact with them (i.e. audience research)
4. Into the ways that we can function more effectively as an organisation (i.e. organisational and management research).

Routine survey work that collects data on the condition of our heritage, or on our audiences and visitors, is not by this definition research. Likewise, inventory and cataloguing work is not research. However, these activities are useful foundations for research which builds on this information.



Below: Senior Curator Sarah Beattie with an embroidered sampler associated with Agnes Broun, the mother of Robert Burns



Head of Archaeology Derek Alexander using specialist equipment at Culloden

## 2. Research in the Trust

Research as defined above can contribute to all areas of the Trust's work. Understanding better the value of our nature and heritage allows us to create better programmes of conservation management, leading to improved outcomes. Understanding better the relevance and value of nature and heritage to people in Scotland allows us to develop better programmes of audience and community engagement. And understanding how we can work more effectively as a complex organisation will help us work more efficiently and sustainably.

The aim of managing research in the Trust is to generate maximum value for the organisation and for its audiences and make a significant contribution to research in relevant disciplines. Often this will be best achieved through Collaborative Research with universities or similar partner organisations.

Contribution to knowledge in the field

<p><b>Facilitated Research</b> Enabling others to undertake their own research for the public benefit.</p>	<p><b>Collaborative Research</b> Working together with partners on research for mutual benefit.</p>
<p><b>Wasted Research</b> Low value outcomes of little benefit to the Trust and little interest in the field.</p>	<p><b>Commissioned Research</b> Instigating new research to inform core activities.</p>

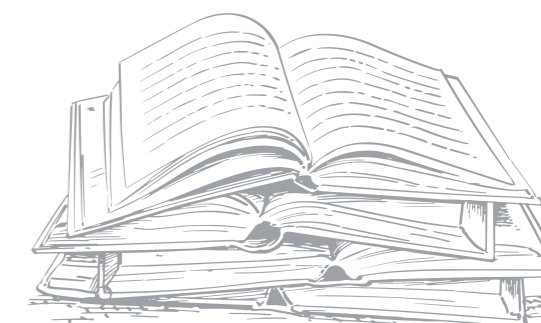
Contribution to NTS Objectives and Priorities

Commitment of Trust Resources

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Contribution to NTS Objectives and Priorities

The Trust must also ensure that research, like all other activities, is undertaken based on a clear cost/benefit assessment, especially when charitable funds and/or staff time is allocated to support it. Again, often this will be best achieved through collaborative research where the resources of the partner organisation can be leveraged to deliver outcomes that support the Trust's objectives and priorities.



Trust ambassador Cal Major spent time with the seabird team at St Kilda in 2024

### 3. Vision

Our vision is for high quality research that contributes to the country's social, economic and cultural life, and understanding of its past, as well as goals for climate, the environment and nature restoration. The Trust's position as a conservation charity with interests in all aspects of place – people, culture, history, nature, heritage – positions us as uniquely able to support interdisciplinary research and deliver real-world outcomes from it.

For the Trust, we want strategically coordinated and focused research that increases knowledge of our sites and their value, and an organisational culture that supports and enables the use of research to make evidenced decisions to inform conservation, enhance engagement and interpretation, and improve operational sustainability. We will nurture a culture where research is a practical, day-to-day activity, for Trust colleagues and volunteers, that delivers tangible benefits across all areas of our work.



Below: Professor Yoshi Miki and Dr Jennifer Melville examining netsuke at Brodick Castle for research into the Trust's Japanese collections



Research volunteer Martin Cotter in the library at Newhailes

## 4. Strategy

The strategy is arranged around four strands of work aimed at developing the Trust's capacity to use research activity to further its charitable objectives.

### STRAND 1: Improved Management and Coordination

The Trust currently engages in a range of research activities. We want to support these activities to better align with our strategic priorities, coordinate their management, and ensure the benefits and impact on the Trust are commensurate with the resources dedicated to supporting them.

#### To improve how we support and facilitate research we will:

- Develop a research policy and handbook that sets out criteria for prioritisation.
- Establish a research steering group to coordinate new research projects. This is intended as a support rather than a governance function.
- Develop an ethical code of practice for research.
- Develop a standard suite of research partnership agreements.
- Develop standard briefs for commissioning research.

### STRAND 2: Increasing Research Impact

We want the Trust to gain the full benefit of the research activity. Research outputs will be shared widely and consistently, and we will evaluate the impact of research on the Trust to improve our systems and processes.

#### We aim to improve the impact of research within the Trust by:

- Establishing a central storage location for filing all research outputs and datasets.
- Developing a programme of internal communications (e.g. seminar series) to share ongoing research.
- Creating an evaluation framework for research projects to assess their value and inform future projects.
- Producing a plan for publishing and disseminating research outwith the Trust.

Below:  
Collaborative research to better understand the marine heritage of Fair Isle



Engineering and conservation specialists carefully record the condition of the walls of the Hill House

### STRAND 3: Developing Research Skills

Across the Trust and in our various teams, there is a range of research skills and knowledge. A small number of colleagues have postgraduate qualifications in different research specialisms, but most research activity is carried out or managed by non-specialist and untrained staff or volunteers with varying levels of experience.



Below: Research into Edinburgh fashion of the 1700s informed a recent exhibition at the Georgian House

We aim to ensure that our people are equipped to undertake and manage research in their own areas. We will do this by:

- Establishing an internal network of active researchers and research managers across the Trust (a Community of Practice).
- Undertaking a research skills audit, leading to an action plan for training and development.
- Working with our Organisational Development team to map career pathways for research active colleagues and roles.
- Establishing a research mentoring programme to support less experienced research active colleagues.
- Exploring a scheme for research mentoring and support (staff and volunteers).
- Investing in access to academic research resources (e.g. JSTOR).
- Exploring Knowledge Exchange Partnerships with universities.



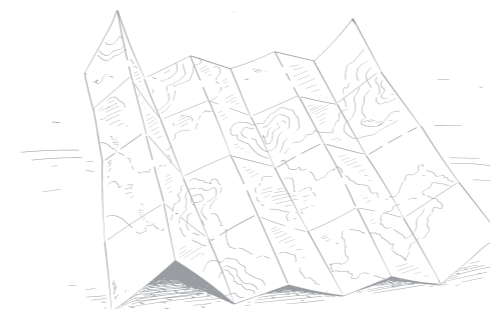
Lewis Donaghy and James Robinson survey scarce mountain plants at Ben Lawers



Research at St Kilda includes studies into the impact of climate change on its scenery, wildlife and cultural landscape

**STRAND 4: Better Partnerships and Collaboration**

The Trust currently works with several Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in various forms of partnership and collaborative arrangement. We want to make sure that the Trust manages these relationships to the best advantage of both partners, and to ensure that the work is aligned with the Trust’s strategic priorities.



**We aim to develop more beneficial research partnerships with HEIs by:**

- Mapping existing university and other research partnerships and identifying opportunities for further development and ensuring they are managed efficiently.
- Understanding how we can access more funding and resources to support research activity.
- Exploring the goal of Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status with UKRI/AHRC.
- Establishing and managing external networks of research partners and stakeholders.
- Establishing a pipeline of fundable research projects/concepts, shifting to a more proactive mode of actively cultivating work that contributes to the Trust’s strategic objectives.

Below: The *Encountering Children of Empire* symposium was jointly organised with Glasgow’s Beniba Centre for Slavery Studies





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Registered address: National Trust for Scotland, Broadstone, 50 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh, EH12 9LD