Phase 1
2018-22

The Research Development Team and Programme

Who We Are

Research sits at the heart of Wellcome Collection, helping us to understand our collections and their contexts, informing the key questions asked by our programmes and exhibitions, and helping people from a diverse range of backgrounds, needs, and interests, to develop innovative, potentially transformative perspectives, knowledge and understandings of the social and cultural contexts of health.

As a new team within Wellcome Collection, over the last six months the Research Development team has been working towards producing a strategic framework that will help us contribute to furthering Wellcome’s mission of improving health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive.

The Research Development Team aims to develop and manage a portfolio of activity that places us at the centre of an experimental and vibrant research culture, blending different research perspectives and practices, and demonstrating diverse ways of exploiting our collections, both analogue and digital, to inspire and support new ideas.

This document lays out our strategic vision and frameworks for delivery for the next four years, and shows how we aim to encourage and inspire a more extensive and diverse research community to explore and interrogate our unique and distinctive collections in pursuit of creative expression and communication, new knowledge and greater understanding of health and humanity.

1 See Wellcome Collection 5yr Forward Plan [insert link]; Wellcome Collection: ‘Who We Are and What We Do’ [insert link]
What we aim to do

Our strategic aims for 2018-22 are:

1. To bring more extensive and diverse research communities to engage critically with our unique and distinctive collections; actively encouraging new approaches, challenging perspectives, and transformative understandings of the social and cultural contexts of health.

2. To create sustainable relationships with those communities: working across institutions and organisations, rather than with individuals.

3. To change how we work: collaboratively as a team, within C&R, and across WC, C&S and WT; proactively deciding on a targeted programme of activities designed to bring about our desired outcomes; strategically so that our collaborations and partnerships are always mutually beneficial.

Key Definitions

Our strategy and programme of research development activities are informed by three key definitions:

'Researchers' are people, from any and all backgrounds, who engage deeply and purposefully with materials drawn from our unique and distinctive collections, either onsite or online, in order to address questions relating to the social and cultural contexts of health.

'Research Communities' are groups of people who share a defined set of interests or experiences and are reachable via some sort of formal or informal organisation, with which we can build a sustained relationship.

'Collections-led' or 'collections-based' activity arises from, is inspired, or informed by direct contact with our unique and distinctive collections: it could not happen in the same way anywhere else.
How we aim to do it

We will deliver our strategic aims by creating a programme of collections-based research development activity.

Working programmatically will help us:

- to manage our resource by making more of what we already do well,
- to work in an agile and iterative way,
- to promote our principles of diversity and inclusion through interactive and accessible activities that include a broad mix of viewpoints and interests,
- to ensure our activities achieve the outcomes that we want.

Our Research Development Programme consists of four integrated strands: three strands of planned proactive activity (Strands 1-3), and one strand of managed responsive activity (Strand 4).

Each strand has a lead, who is responsible for designing, planning and overseeing the strategic direction and collections balance of their strand, working in collaboration with other team and department members, across WC, or with external partners, as appropriate.

Strand 1: Building New Research Communities

Lead: RM

This strand of proactive activity is designed to build new and more diverse research communities by:

- Forging sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships with key external organisations.
- Creating a pro-active, collections-led, repeatable schedule of activities such as:
  - An extended and more diverse programme of evening/afternoon collections-led research seminars that might attract and inspire new researchers
  - A major series of Research Development Open Days for Final Year Dissertation and Masters students who are deciding on topics and sources for their dissertations, timed to work with the academic curricula
  - A series of events that will encourage research-based practitioners and educators from a wide range of artistic, medical or aligned practice backgrounds to engage with our collections.

- Working to improve the diversity and inclusivity of our research communities, for example by developing:
  - A series of non-traditional researcher workshops, especially for people who experience barriers to research because of their health, ethnicity, or sexuality.
**Strand 2: Developing Early Career Researchers**

*Lead: EB*

This strand of proactive activity is designed to broaden and diversify our early career research community (i.e. people who have decided on research as a fundamental part of their career strategy), including national and international researchers from across the disciplinary range of arts, humanities, social science and digital humanities, by

- Creating fruitful partnerships with national and international academic consortia, leading to
  - Collections-based internships
  - Collaborative doctoral awards
- Developing cross-disciplinary early career research networks, based around the collections, through H&SS funding and collaboration with consortia that offer unique opportunities to create new research questions that link science and art, and devise impactful public programmes.
- Encouraging diverse early career research communities to develop new methodological approaches to the collections through
  - Collections Workshops
  - Methods Conference

**Strand 3: Knowing and Understanding the Collections**

*Lead: WS*

This strand of proactive activity is designed to develop and disseminate knowledge of the collections and to contribute to Wellcome Collection’s national and international profile by,

- encouraging WC staff to conduct research in the collections and to publish their research in a range of strategically significant venues and platforms,
- gaining WCLT support for a mentoring and research sabbatical scheme,
- annually sponsoring a collections-research panel at a major disciplinary conference,
- leveraging the benefits of our venue, programme and diverse collections by collaborating with **externally-funded projects**, conferences and institutions, from a broad disciplinary and cultural range,
- developing an onsite collections researchers network,
- facilitating a cross-Wellcome Collection Staff Development Group in collaboration with other WC departments,
- contributing to an annual series of cross-C&R events promoting newly available collections.
Strand 4: WC/WT Collections Research Support
Lead: AS

This strand of responsive activity is intended to give the broadest possible access to the collections, and promote Wellcome Collection’s success as a world leading museum and library by:

- forging close and mutually-beneficial collaborative relationships across WC and WT,
- providing advice, ideas and access to collections content and broader intellectual context for our colleagues in Public Programme, Digital Engagement, Public Engagement and Policy,
- devising an agreed schedule of support practices and protocols,
- proactively re-purposing our responsive collections research across the research development programme.

How will we know if our strategy is working?

We will set clear aims and objectives for each activity in line with our strategy – whether a single event or a whole series. We will in-build evaluation/evidence gathering processes in our programme design and delivery.

We will reflect regularly on how things are going, learn from what does work and change what doesn’t.

We will ensure that our strategy is working in harmony with wider departmental aims, plans and policies, and Wellcome Collection priorities, such as the Audience Development and Diversity and Inclusion Strategies.

We will measure and evaluate our success against three Wellcome Collection Success Outcomes:

1. ‘Researchers contribute to knowledge and understanding about health.’
2. ‘Wellcome Collection is recognised as a world-leading museum and library.’
3. ‘Wellcome Collection encourages a broad and diverse audience to critically engage with health.’
For Phase 2 of the Research Development Strategy, our aim is to build upon and develop the outward facing activities established throughout Phase 1 by setting ourselves a further strategic objective:

4. To develop WC’s national and international research profile

We will aim to achieve this by

- Seeking cross-WCLT agreement on creating a vibrant and productive collections research culture
- Deepening our relationship with H&SS funded centres and Hub residencies
- Exploring the benefits and implications of achieving Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status
- Developing national and international research collaborations with heritage and cultural institutions
- Shifting our focus to our newly accessible online resources at wellcomecollection.org in order to develop wider and more diverse national and especially international research communities.