

Workshop Briefing Note

Measuring the Value of Heritage Science – 22nd January 2026

Contextualised within the 2024–27 Strategic Framework for Heritage Science in the UK

1. Introduction

The National Heritage Science Forum (NHSF) is convening this workshop to advance shared understanding of **how to measure and demonstrate the value of heritage science**. This aim directly supports the **Public Value outcome** in the [Strategic Framework for Heritage Science in the UK 2024–27](#), which calls for “**measurable positive change for society resulting from heritage science**” and a stronger collective understanding of *who benefits* and *how*.

The workshop builds on two strands of NHSF work which took place under the 2018–2023 framework:

1. **Identification of Societal Challenges** – defining the major societal issues to which heritage science can contribute.
2. **Impact Group Work** – understanding methods, and exploring tools and shared approaches, for evidencing heritage science’s value for different audiences.

This work, predominantly carried out between 2020–2022, supports the 2024–27 Framework’s ambition to strengthen **Public Value, Research, and Community**, and create the *virtuous circle* through which heritage science delivers meaningful benefit across society.

2. The Strategic Framework 2024–27: Context for this workshop

The [2024–27 Strategic Framework](#) emphasises:

Heritage science as essential to addressing global and societal challenges

Heritage science research is vital for climate resilience, wellbeing, sustainable development and understanding cultural identity—all areas where evidence-based contributions are needed and valued.

A community need to demonstrate public value

Evidence from the previous framework cycle (2018–23) shows that while progress has been made, **the value and impact of heritage science remain insufficiently visible**, and organisations continue to struggle to capture the impact of heritage science activity. The heritage science community wants greater clarity on what to measure, how to measure it, and how to communicate it effectively. Stakeholders (e.g. funders including institutional governance bodies) are increasingly asking for evidence of impact and value, employing different metrics and data collection methods.

A strategic call to action

The Framework explicitly sets out the need to:

- **Develop consensus on what to measure and how to measure it**
- **Improve visibility of how research addresses societal challenges**
- **Build stronger links between heritage science and public policy**
- **Increase knowledge-exchange and public engagement**

[Further information: [Strategic Framework](#) p. 11 pdf]

This workshop supports these actions by helping NHSF members build shared understanding of **value**, **impact**, and **evidence**.

3. Strand One: Societal Challenges

Over the period 2018-2023, NHSF's Research Working Group identified **five societal challenges**, now embedded within the Strategic Framework as central to demonstrating public value and research relevance:

1. **Sustainable Development**
2. **Climate Emergency**
3. **Improved Wellbeing**
4. **Equality & Inclusivity**
5. **Digital Society**

The aim of this work is to inspire and encourage connections between heritage science research and issues of importance to society. Each challenge is expressed as a challenge to the heritage science community which, if actioned, provide:

- A clear, public-facing narrative showing how heritage science improves lives
- A shared thematic structure for organising impact evidence
- A mechanism to connect heritage science to global frameworks (e.g., UN Sustainable Development Goals), cross-government priorities, and interdisciplinary research initiatives

[Further information:

- [Societal Challenges and Heritage Science Research](#)
- [Member Meeting December 2020 \(provocation paper, presentations on the strategic context for the contribution of heritage science to societal challenges\)](#)
- [Heritage Science and Societal Challenges: a blueprint for action](#) (pdf)]

The societal challenges have been used by NHSF members to [structure case studies](#) on the impact of heritage science and as the topic for ‘**deep dive**’ events on [Climate Emergency](#), [EDI](#) and [Digital Society](#).

4. Strand Two: Impact Group Work on Demonstrating and Measuring Value

In parallel, NHSF’s Impact Working Group sought to tackle the issue of **how to demonstrate and measure** connections between heritage science and societal challenges (to a range of values for a variety of audiences). In the period 2018-2023, the group reviewed a range of evaluation methodologies and impact frameworks, responding to member demand for:

- **Shared indicators** and a consistent approach
- Impact **evidence** that reflects diverse benefits (economic, social, environmental, cultural, scientific)
- **Tools** usable by organisations of different sizes and capacities
- Ways to align heritage science with **national policy frameworks**, such as the DCMS Culture & Heritage Capital Programme

Key achievements feeding into this workshop

- Identification of models from REF (Research Excellence Framework), SFI (Science Foundation Ireland), UN (Sustainable Development Goals) and DCMS cultural & heritage capital work that could be adapted for heritage science impact measurement
- Development of additional case studies demonstrating heritage science benefits
- Community consultations indicating an appetite for knowledge of tools and methods to support collecting data consistently, baseline data and a possible evidence hub

[Further information:

- [Understanding audiences for the impact of heritage science](#) (March 2020 Member Meeting)

- [Developing an impact toolkit for heritage science](#) (April 2021 Member Meeting), in particular presentation: [Research on developing a toolkit to measure the impact of heritage science](#) (pdf)
- [Heritage science case studies](#): what is heritage science and how does it benefit society?]

Why this matters within the 2024–27 Strategic Framework

The Framework explicitly states the need to:

- **Better understand heritage science stakeholders and beneficiaries**
- **Develop consensus on what to measure**
- **Strengthen mechanisms for sharing examples of research delivering societal benefit**
- **Build evidence for public policy engagement**

The new NHSF Measurement Frameworks task group is building on the previous societal challenges and impact work – through this workshop – to meet these goals.

5. How the Two Strands Work Together in the Strategic Framework

Societal Challenges (Strand 1)	Impact Measurement (Strand 2)
Define <i>what matters</i> to society	Define <i>how heritage science contributes</i>
Provide themes for impact reporting	Supply tools and indicators
Support alignment to global & national agendas	Support evidence for funding, policy, and advocacy
Strengthen research relevance	Strengthen measurable public value
Reinforce interdisciplinary collaboration	Reinforce knowledge-exchange mechanisms

The Strategic Framework positions both strands as essential to achieving **Public Value**, **Research Excellence**, and **Community Development**.

6. The Role of This Workshop in Implementing the Strategic Framework

This workshop directly supports the Framework’s actions by:

- Building collective understanding of the **value generated by heritage science**
- Sharing examples (through case studies) of **what to measure and how**
- Strengthening the members’ ability to provide **robust, visible evidence** of societal contribution
- Helping organisations link their work to sector-wide outcomes (**strategic framework**)
- Informing future steps to **develop common approaches** or **share evidence**
- Enhancing the community’s ability to engage government, funders, and the public

Anticipated outcomes

- A clearer understanding among NHSF members of the societal challenges their research addresses and how to articulate these effectively
- Practical examples from other members on methods of measuring impact
- Insight into emerging methodologies of measuring value that could be tailored to heritage science
- A conceptual framework to support members' work to build arguments about research impact
- Alignment between organisational work and the **2024–27 UK-wide strategic framework goals**

7. Conclusion

The 2024–27 Strategic Framework establishes a renewed vision for how heritage science can enrich society through excellent research, an inclusive community, and meaningful public value. This workshop plays a crucial role in delivering that vision by supporting the development of a shared understanding amongst NHSF members on credible, and strategic approaches to measuring value and demonstrating impact.

Together, by aligning the community's work with the Framework's desired outcomes, the heritage science sector can strengthen its visibility, influence, and ability to address current societal challenges.

NHSF invites its members to nominate colleagues to join the Measurement Frameworks task group to continue to develop the resources needed by the heritage science community.

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