



[Briefing Note: DCMS Areas of Research Interest \(ARIs\)](#)



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Research and analysis

DCMS Areas of Research Interest

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Foreword

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) supports the UK's economic growth, civic life and national identity through the sectors it champions and the policies it develops and delivers. These sectors form a vital part of the UK's social, cultural and economic infrastructure. From arts, culture and heritage to media, creative industries, sport, civil society, youth, tourism and the visitor economy, DCMS works across policy areas that shape how people participate in society, experience place and connect with one another.

Screenshot of the updated DCMS Areas of Research Interest (May 2026).

Link (external): [DCMS Areas of Research Interest](#)

1. Introduction: What are Areas of Research Interest?

The UK government publishes specific Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) to outline its current research and development priorities and guide its relationships with researchers, academic bodies, and institutions. ARIs are regularly updated documents with a mixture of specific research questions and broader methodological approaches relating to key issues.

Areas of Research Interest documents were first created in 2017 in response to recommendations by the 2015 Nurse review of the UK Research Councils. The latest update by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) is the third iteration.

In the words of DCMS Chief Scientific Advisor Professor Tom Crick, “ARIs are an important part of how government departments communicate their evidence needs to the wider research, innovation, analytical and policy communities.” ([Source](#) – external link)

2. How is the document structured?

High-priority outcomes

The document identifies three “high-priority outcomes”:

1. Growth and good jobs in every place.
2. A more socially cohesive country with an inclusive national story.
3. Richer lives with choices and opportunities for all (regardless of age, region and socio-economic background).

These serve as foundational goals underpinning each of the ARIs. In practical terms, researchers should bear one or more of these points in mind as either immediate or long-term outcomes of their projects. In a heritage science context, a more indirect, long-term effect is likely. There is also a particular focus throughout on youth engagement and resilience, including resilience in the face of socioeconomic, political, environmental and technological change.

Portfolios

The ARIs themselves are organised into eight categories, aligned with each DCMS portfolio:

- Civil Society and Youth
- Creative Industries and Artificial Intelligence (as it relates to the creative industries)
- Culture
- Gambling
- Media and International
- Sport
- Visitor Economy

- Heritage

The points of interest to the heritage science community primarily sit within the Heritage section, with items of broader relevance also present in Visitor Economy, Culture, and Creative Industries & AI.

Cross-cutting themes

DCMS has also identified eleven “cross-cutting themes”, which recur throughout. Rather than defined subcategories, these are common threads to keep in mind as you read (and as you design your project).

The cross-cutting themes are general guiding principles designed to illustrate the interconnected relationships between the portfolios, promoting a transdisciplinary approach rather than viewing each ARI as separate and rigid. There is significant overlap with the high-priority outcomes.

- Growth
- Place
- Pride and social cohesion
- Participation and engagement
- Prevention and early intervention
- Value, valuation and valorisation
- Major events and national moments
- AI and digital technologies
- Resilience
- Environmental sustainability
- What works and evaluation

3. Heritage Science Research

Across these themes, there is consistent emphasis on understanding the current state of the cultural and heritage sectors, including skills gaps, recruitment & retention, and barriers to access & participation, as well as the influence of cultural heritage on UK soft power and its role in social cohesion. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent events, there is an onus on evaluating sector resilience to financial, geopolitical, and climate-related shocks. There are recurring questions on how we measure and mitigate both the climate impacts of heritage organisations and the risks posed by climate change to tangible and intangible heritage assets. Digital skills and

changing ways of producing & interpreting cultural heritage also feature prominently and, naturally, the impacts, uses, and potential risks of Artificial Intelligence within the sector are high on the list.

Direct references to heritage science provide concrete opportunities for measuring the value of heritage science and integrating research with cultural and economic policy:

- “Building on heritage science approaches, how can advanced material analysis and risk modelling be translated into standardised tools to articulate the economic and cultural value of preventative conservation and maintenance works?”
- “What are the best methodologies and indicators to measure the benefits of halting ongoing material failure and degradation of theatres, performance venues and museums?
 - “In particular building on heritage science approaches, what parts of a theatre and museum operations are most impacted by degradation (including human capital elements)?”
 - “What is the lifetime of different capital upgrades within these types of buildings?”

Heritage science inherently crosses multiple themes and portfolio categories, and is uniquely positioned to fulfil the call for “insights from across the social sciences, arts and humanities, engineering, data science and other relevant fields” including “[i]nterdisciplinary research, international comparisons and new approaches to data and evaluation” (DCMS).

There are also opportunities for heritage science-related data infrastructure for “mapping international collaborations and tracing the evolution of [cultural heritage] protection projects globally” or evaluations “trac[ing] the evolution of collaboration strategies across cultural protection strategies.”

Other potentially relevant ARIs include:

- “What are the implications of digital platform reliance for the cultural sector?”
- Specific investigations into the impacts of culture and heritage on health, wellbeing, and recovery.

4. How does DCMS use these ARIs?

DCMS aspires to use ARIs as critical vehicle to build a strong evidence base across its policy portfolio and range of responsibilities, collecting evidence to support robust decision-making and policymaking. They are designed as a form of dialogue between government and researchers, with a focus on specificity, curiosity, and evaluation. “For government, the challenge is not simply to know whether something is valuable in general terms. It is to understand what works, for whom, in which places, through what mechanisms, at what costs, and with what wider effects.” (Prof. Tom Crick)

Purposes

- To communicate research needs externally and facilitate engagement.
- To support demonstration of social and economic value of DCMS sectors.
- To underpin evidence-backed decision-making and understand the interconnected costs, benefits and consequences to changes across portfolios and themes.
- To horizon scan to ensure its sectors are resilient and inform planning/ability to change at scale.
- To encourage collaboration with wider scientific communities and external partners to advance and broaden its evidence base (including “universities, research institutes, national academies, industry, arm’s length bodies, civil society organisations, practitioners, funders and communities themselves.”)

The ARIs “highlight the questions where new knowledge, data and analysis can most usefully inform policy development, strengthen the evidence base for decision-making, and ultimately improve outcomes for citizens and communities across the UK” (DCMS).

5. Relevance to the Heritage Science Sector Going Forward

The question remains: how should the heritage science community engage with the Areas of Research Interest?

The ARIs are an opportunity to audit the state of heritage science research: review the current body of evidence, identify strengths and gaps, and evaluate potential policy implications. The focus on evaluation, specificity and deliverability can provoke conversation on what works, why, and how. They function as a “route [...] to identify where existing evidence can help, where new research is needed, where methods need to be developed, and where collaboration across disciplines and sectors can strengthen policy.” (Crick)

The topics, cross-cutting themes, and methodological premises are useful tools to guide the shape and direction of research. In the context of the [Strategic Framework for Heritage Science 2024-2027](#), they are key to building stronger links between heritage science and public policy, and can be a concrete mode of demonstrating the direct public value of heritage science.

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