

Museum Essentials: Working Ethically

Internal Ethics Committee case study

National Museums Liverpool (NML) has an international reputation for its ethical approach. This has been supported by a clear commitment from the top of the organisation and has been reflected through partnerships, programmes and activities.

In 2015 to support this commitment an internal ethics committee was established to be the conscience of National Museums Liverpool with the primary objective to embed ethical thinking in all aspects of their work.

The Ethics Committee aims to:

- advise the executive team and board of trustees on ethical considerations
- actively promote sound ethical behaviour across all areas of work
- provide support and inspire confidence in ethical decision making
- keep abreast of the external environment and ethical implications
- help identify training and development needs
- be a forum for open and honest discussion.

The purpose of the Ethics Committee is to be a formal cross-departmental working group of NML and as such:

- promotes good ethical practice across NML
- helps insure NML's values and reputation are upheld and checks the veracity of NML's position on key agendas and priorities
- has a formal advisory role to the executive team and board of trustees
- establishes a framework for raising concerns and keeps a record of decisions and their rationale and impact (internally and externally).

The Ethics Committee sits within a clear governance structure that defines a formal process and criteria for making informed assessments and recommendations:

- two-way dialogue on rationale and decision making and impacts
- members should be qualified to judge issues with a broad cross-NML perspective
- membership not based on seniority - related to work area or individual expertise
- monthly meetings and extraordinary meetings when advice is required urgently
- respects confidentiality
- director/executive team and trustees are ethics champions
- ethics should be covered on NML's risk register (compliance)
- updates should be included in board of trustees' reports.

The Ethics Committee look to continue to embed ethical practice within NML for example by rolling out ethics training, preparing an ethical handbook.

Would this work in your organisation?