

# The Design Museum awarded Independent Research Organisation status

11 April

## [PRESS IMAGES](#)

The Design Museum today announces that it has been granted Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status, becoming the first independent museum to be awarded the recognition. This acknowledges the museum's ability to lead and support groundbreaking research. IRO status is awarded to the Design Museum by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Achieving IRO accreditation reflects how the Design Museum has built its capacity as a centre of research and excellence. The Design Museum's research culture is based less on studying historical collections and more on understanding the contemporary and future landscape that design plays a tangible role in shaping. While the purpose of the museum is to make the impact of design visible, the purpose of research at the museum is to make design research impactful.

Placed on the same footing as universities, institutions with IRO status are eligible for a range of funding from UKRI to sustain further research. Other cultural institutions to have received this accreditation include the Science Museum, Tate and the V&A. Within the IRO portfolio, the Design Museum seeks to occupy a unique position by advancing future-facing, practice-led research that recognises the arts and humanities as central to the UK's innovation agenda.

The museum supports design research across departments, from curatorial and learning to audiences and collections. Its flagship research platform is Future Observatory, the Design Museum's national research programme for the green transition, and the hub

for Future Observatory: Design the Green Transition, a £25m three-year programme delivered in partnership with AHRC. Future Observatory funds, nurtures and exhibits new design thinking on urgent environmental issues.

In the last three years AHRC has, working very closely with Future Observatory, distributed more than £18 million to at least 60 design research projects across academia and industry. The bulk of that funding has supported the Green Transition Ecosystem grants, which are multi-partner multi-sector awards based at universities across the UK. However, funding has also supported dozens of research projects looking at issues from waste reduction to climate resilience. A new Future Observatory display space was opened last year at the museum, to introduce visitors to ongoing design research across the UK. In 2021, Future Observatory absorbed the museum's long-standing Designers in Residence Programme, transforming it into Design Researchers in Residence to reflect the new focus on research.

**Tim Marlow, Director of the Design Museum**, said: “To be the first independent museum to receive IRO status signifies the museum's evolving position in the cultural landscape. We have always been a place where the range and impact of design has been explored, through our exhibitions, displays, events and learning programming. Our newly granted research status will give us the opportunity to explore the potential of design to give shape to the future in greater depth. It will also give creative energy to the museum and be a catalyst for change well beyond the walls of our landmark building.”

**Justin McGuirk, Director of Future Observatory at the Design Museum**, said: “The Design Museum's research culture stands out in the museum landscape because it is not focused on reinterpreting our collection but on reflecting design's role at the interface of change. With Future Observatory's national remit to support design research for the green transition, research is now a core part of the museum's mission, and that is reflected across the board, from the Curatorial and Learning teams to our work on low-carbon exhibition-making. It is deeply rewarding to see that culture recognised.”

**Christopher Smith, Executive Chair of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)**, said: “Design unlocks system-level thinking to address the large scale and interconnected challenges of a global world. AHRC is proud to have placed Design at the centre of its work within UKRI, catalysing new collaborations and raising the ambitions and impact of researchers and practitioners alike. We welcome the Design Museum as an Independent Research Organization, and look forward enormously to new partnerships in design-led research and innovation.”

**-Ends-**

### **Notes to Editors**

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#### **About the Design Museum:**

The Design Museum is the world’s leading museum devoted to contemporary architecture and design. Its work encompasses all elements of design, including fashion, product and graphic design. Since it opened its doors in 1989 the museum has displayed everything from an AK-47 to high heels designed by Christian Louboutin. It has staged over 100 exhibitions, welcomed over seven million visitors and showcased the work of some of the world’s most celebrated designers and architects including Paul Smith, Zaha Hadid, Jonathan Ive, Frank Gehry, Eileen Gray, Dieter Rams, Margaret Calvert and Yinka Ilori.

On 24 November 2016, the Design Museum relocated to Kensington, west London. John Pawson converted the interior of a 1960s modernist building to create a new home for the Design Museum giving it three times more space in which to show a wider range of exhibitions and significantly extend its learning programme. Since opening in Kensington in 2016, the Design Museum has hosted major exhibitions including *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition, Moving*

*to Mars, Amy: Beyond the Stage, Sneakers Unboxed: Studio to Street, Electronic: From Kraftwerk to The Chemical Brothers, Charlotte Perriand: The Modern Life, Football: Designing the Beautiful Game, Waste Age: What can design do?, Ai Weiwei: Making Sense, The Offbeat Sari, and REBEL: 30 Years of London Fashion.*



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[designmuseum.org](https://www.designmuseum.org)

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### **About Future Observatory:**

Future Observatory is the Design Museum's national research programme for the green transition. Based at the museum, it is coordinated in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Acting as both a coordinating hub for a nationwide programme, as well as a research department within the museum, Future Observatory curates exhibitions, programmes events and funds and publishes new research, all with the aim of championing new design thinking on environmental issues.

 **FUTURE  
OBSERVATORY**

The logo icon for Future Observatory is a stylized circular symbol composed of several parallel diagonal lines of varying lengths, creating a sense of depth and movement.

[futureobservatory.org](https://www.futureobservatory.org)

#FutureObservatory

### **About Arts and Humanities Research Council:**

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy,

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**DESIGN  
MUSEUM**

languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.



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