

Learning and Public Engagement Policy

September 2023

Dorset History Centre
Bridport Road
Dorchester
DT1 1RP



Service Description

The **Joint Archives Service (JAS)**, based at **Dorset History Centre (DHC)** is operated on behalf of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council, and Dorset Council. Partnership between the two authorities as delivered through the joint service sits at the heart of JAS activities and underwrites the protocols and processes by which DHC acquires material. This is enshrined in the 2022 Inter-Authority on Archives which was approved by the Cabinets of both councils.

Local history services (primarily local studies library material) are provided locally at **Poole History Centre** and **Bournemouth Library's Heritage Zone** respectively.

DHC is the sole local authority archive within the county with Accredited status as conferred by The National Archives. Local studies library services and the Historic Environment Record are operated on behalf of Dorset Council.

Our Vision

That Dorset History Centre is the physical and virtual hub for the archival and recorded heritage of the county of Dorset in both hard copy and digital formats.

Our Mission

To acquire, preserve and make accessible the archives of the county of Dorset and so promote cultural, economic, educational and social well-being.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Learning and public engagement are the processes by which the JAS encourages the wider public to understand, use and value the raw materials of history, along with access to online resources and the Dorset Local Studies Library. A fundamental purpose in collecting archives is to see them widely consulted for leisure and official research, finding stories of Dorset's people and places to help interpret the past.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy should be read in conjunction with other JAS policies, particularly the service's Access Policy and Volunteer Policy.

3. Aim and Purpose

- 3.1. The purpose of this policy is to detail the types and range of learning and outreach offered by the JAS.
- 3.2. Through its Learning and Public Engagement Policy the JAS aims to:
 - Encourage new and non-traditional audiences to engage with archives.
 - Encourage the appreciation and use of archives and local studies by groups and individuals (outside formal education) as aids to learning, leisure, community cohesion and wellbeing.

- Liaise with community-based heritage projects and initiatives, facilitating positive collaboration and learning and ensuring that archive and local studies content and heritage sector skills are understood and built in to plans.
- To provide high quality learning opportunities based on the JAS collections to learners of all ages and a wide range of abilities via educational and social care providers.
- To liaise with colleagues in related sectors (museums, libraries, arts, adult learning, higher education, and social care) building partnerships and joint commissioning opportunities.
- To promote the JAS and its collections through outreach and attendance at events for local groups and organisations.
- Develop and maintain offers to volunteers, volunteers with additional support requirements and students on work experience placements which enable and encourage learning, new skills, and experience.

4. Equality and Diversity

- 4.1. The JAS completed an Equalities Impact Assessment in 2023 which has been published online.
- 4.2. The DHC building is broadly compliant with the Equalities Act, 2010. It has level access for the public from the car park at the rear with disabled parking spaces, wide level access doorways including bi-fold automatic doors at the main entrance. Audio loop systems at the reception desks and in the Lecture Room. An accessible toilet. For members of staff there is ramped access to the staff entrance and a lift to the first floor. DHC staff work individually with customers, visual enhancement tools are available and an accessible computer station. Alternative formats can be supplied where possible. DHC staff receive training to help them work with customers affected by less visible disabilities such as Dementia and Autism.
- 4.3. The JAS is firmly committed to the principles of equality and diversity for learning and public engagement opportunities. We actively seek engagement with marginalised and minority communities.

5. Principles of Learning and Public Engagement

- 5.1. The JAS will:
- We will work in partnerships, within the heritage, education and social care sectors, to increase the reach, capacity and skills of all organisations involved.
 - Identify sustainable opportunities to enable marginalised communities to engage with their Dorset cultural heritage and to enhance and diversify the JAS collections at DHC.
 - Ensure that all staff who come into contact with the public are well-informed and confident in working with a range of audiences.
 - Promote the use of Dorset's cultural heritage and rich JAS collections both digitally and in physical format.
 - Facilitate access for all and deliver outcomes in line with the corporate priorities of our funders.
 - Provide opportunities for self-directed learning for all visitors and enquirers to DHC creating an informative and welcoming environment that encourages learning and research on-site at DHC.
 - Ensure that we actively promote Equality and Diversity best practice and regularly review the Joint Archives Service's Equality Impact Assessment.
 - Work with colleagues and partners, both across the three authorities and externally, to share good practice and offer learning and outreach in new venues and to new audiences.
 - Evaluate our work and that of partnership projects to ensure that we meet targets and deliver quality outcomes.
 - Make effective use of staff and customer feedback to improve our service delivery.

6. Delivery

- 6.1. To support the delivery of learning, and public engagement, the JAS will:
- Support and train JAS staff to ensure that learning and outreach in their many forms are at the centre of what we do.

- Ensure that all JAS based projects incorporate significant elements of learning and engagement.
- Improve the virtual learning environment by increasing the quantity of digital data, both catalogue descriptions and curated content as appropriate, with awareness of climate-related consequences and within the JAS's capacity.
- Develop educational, training and activity opportunities in response to requests to support and advise projects of partner organisations.
- Work collaboratively within the heritage sector, and with Dorset Council and BCP to contribute to the Corporate Priorities for well-being and social connection.
- Encourage and support community groups to engage with collections and bid for grant aid to deliver projects with positive outcomes, including enhancing the JAS collections with diverse accessions.
- Within the capacity of the JAS, engage with schools, colleges, adult learning services, community learning groups and universities to encourage access to the collections held at DHC.
- Provide a variety of well-supported and meaningful volunteer roles both onsite at DHC and remotely.
- Communicate our learning and public engagement services and opportunities as widely as possible, including through social and traditional media.
- Deliver high quality training in heritage skills.

6.2. Since public engagement and learning are central to the purpose of the JAS, all staff participate in promotional and learning activities. This takes various forms as follows:

- **Formal Learning-** short programmes of study with clearly defined learning objectives and outcomes for adults or children.
- **Informal learning** when learning happens because of some other task or activity where learning is **not** a primary element of the activity. For example, through volunteering or accessing information at the Dorset History Centre.
- **Outreach** the process by which the JAS promotes its services and activities to both new and existing audiences through exhibitions, talks, workshops and attendance at community events.
- **Community engagement** involves supporting and advising groups who are delivering projects as well as developing innovative and inspiring approaches enabling a wide range of people to interact with and contribute to Dorset's archives.
- **Social media** through the use of Twitter (@DorsetArchives) and other Web 2.0 tools (such as blogs, file-sharing websites or other Dorset Council Social media accounts) used in accordance with [Dorset Council's Social Media Acceptable Use Policy](#).
- **Onsite and online** public access to the online catalogue of DHC's archive collections. Onsite access to documents, online resources, Dorset Local Studies Reference Library and individual assistance with enquiries, in person, by telephone and by email. See also DHC Access Policy.

7. Review of the Policy

7.1. The policy will be reviewed in consultation with interested organisations, stakeholders and individuals every 3 years to take into account any new legislation, regulations, guidance, or business practices. The next review of this policy will take place in September 2026.

8. Further information or comment

8.1. Copies of this policy are available in large print.

8.2. To comment on this policy or for further information about it, contact the Service Manager for Archives and Records at:

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Tel: 01305 250550

E-mail: archives@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/dorset-history-centre>