

The Future of Creative Glass in Sunderland



Call for options appraisal and feasibility study

Deadline for submissions 27th February 2024 at 12noon



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Overview

Sunderland Culture, in partnership with University of Sunderland and Sunderland City Council, and with support from Arts Council England is looking to appoint an independent consultant (or consultants) to support a review of the future of creative glass in Sunderland, including options appraisal and feasibility study.

Section 1: Introduction to National Glass Centre

1.1 History of glass in Sunderland

Glassmaking is part of the fabric of Sunderland's history, bringing together its religious, social and industrial heritage. Ever since Benedict Biscop brought the first glaziers over from Gaul in 674 AD, Sunderland has had a rich glassmaking heritage. Glassmaking has played an important part in the industrial landscape of the City, with factories providing employment and economic stability until the late 20th century. Since the decline of these important industries, National Glass Centre at the University of Sunderland has been dedicated to continuing the legacy of glass making. The venue is indisputably the UK's pre-eminent research-driven glass 'production' house, supporting the research, teaching, production, exhibition and public enjoyment of contemporary glass through hosting the University's Glass and Ceramics department. National Glass Centre's outstanding production facilities are open to all; it is a place where the creative process can be witnessed close-up and where art is made by both world-renowned artists, emerging student talent and members of the local community of different ages, interests and abilities.

1.2 Background to National Glass Centre

National Glass Centre is the centre of national excellence supporting the teaching, production and exhibition of contemporary glass as a visual arts form. National Glass Centre is owned by the University of Sunderland, located on the University's campus on the banks of the River Wear and is programmed by Sunderland Culture. As well as housing a permanent collection of International Studio Glass and presenting a glass focused programme of exhibitions, the building is also home to the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (NGCA) and Sunderland Creatives Gallery. It is a visitor attraction grounded in the University's world leading reputation in the development of the **Studio Glass** movement and its current role supporting the University's civic strategy to deliver culture-led place making.





Open seven days a week, entrance to National Glass Centre is free, with charges applied for glassmaking and ceramic experiences, adult courses, and some family learning activities. No charges are applied for temporary exhibitions or daily glassmaking demonstrations. In a normal year, we attract around **230,000 visitors**.

Built on the site of a former shipyard J.L.Thompson and Sons, National Glass Centre aims to **celebrate Sunderland's glass making and industrial heritage**, inspire a sense of civic pride and contribute to the economy of our City by

developing a glass industry for the 21st century.

National Glass Centre was the recipient of the first major Arts Lottery Award in the North East and is the first Arts Lottery Funded building. In October 1998 HRH Prince Charles officially opened the Centre.

Formerly an independent charitable trust, the **University of Sunderland** took on National Glass Centre in 2010, building on its long and distinguished role in glass education and research. National Glass Centre is a public gallery and home to the University of Sunderland's Glass and Ceramics Department.

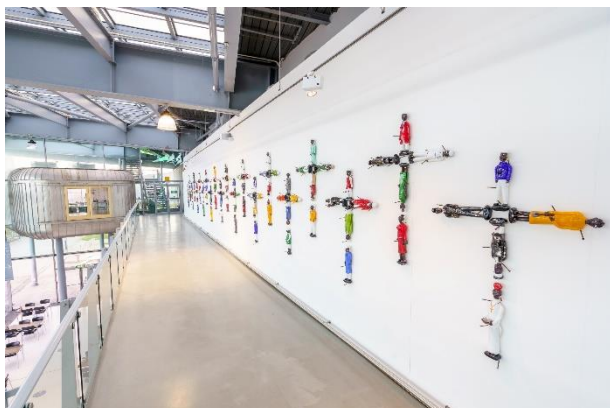
National Glass Centre's **arts programme** exhibits exceptional work by national and international artists; commissions new work; supports experts to develop and share their practice; encourages emerging artists and creates opportunities for visual artists to explore the potential of glass. Sunderland's glass heritage is celebrated in its permanent gallery – 'Stories of Glass'.

Sunderland has a rich heritage of glass making that dates back to 674AD. Benedict Biscop, founder of Wearmouth-Jarrow Priory, brought skilled craftsmen from Gaul to create the first stained glass window in England for St Peter's Church, Monkwearmouth. Using compelling personal stories from local people and striking audiovisual display, **Stories of Glass** in Sunderland is our interactive exhibition which charts the origins, growth and legacy of glass making in the City.



Our **resident glass makers** are skilled artisans producing a variety of beautiful glass items daily, including commissioned pieces and seasonal objects such as Christmas baubles and Halloween pumpkins. In addition, they also deliver public demonstrations and allow people to experience glass blowing for beginners through a variety of workshop opportunities.





We are dedicated to creating opportunities for everyone to have a go and be involved in arts and culture. Our **learning team** delivers an extensive family crafts programme with lots to do for all ages, such as glass painting, glass sandcasting, glass fusing and ceramic crafts. There is a varied curriculum-based offer for primary and secondary school visits. We also offer a year-round programme of adult courses and workshops in a range of glassmaking and ceramic techniques

National Glass Centre sells souvenirs and stunning examples of glass art and craft in our **gift shop** and **The Glass Yard Cafe** has views out on to the River Wear.

National Glass Centre has been developing a **formal collection** of international Studio Glass since 2016. The collection currently consists of over 500 objects and the venue has secured 'working towards' museum accreditation status.

In March 2018, after 18 months creating a brand-new space for art and artists in Sunderland, **Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art** reopened with a major new commission with artist Fiona Crisp. The gallery (which relocated from its city centre location on Fawcett Street) focuses on producing exhibitions of new work by emerging and established regional, national and international artists. Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2021 having been one of the very first contemporary art galleries in Britain. It has provided major international figures with their first UK exhibitions, including Harun Farocki (Germany) and Cory Arcangel (USA), and exhibited fourteen Turner Prize nominees. Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art has a collection of around 500 objects.

Sunderland Creatives Gallery opened in April 2022 showcasing the work of University of Sunderland staff and students. The new gallery not only gives the University's Arts and Creatives Industries students a chance to shine but also provide them with first-hand experience of delivering exhibitions. Students also benefit from the use of the NGC Gallery as part of the annual programme presenting the MA Glass & Ceramics show.



National Glass Centre is part of the innovative **Sunderland Culture**, set up by the University, Sunderland City Council and the MAC Trust in 2016 to operate and develop the city's cultural assets. Sunderland Culture is a pioneering place-based partnership working across the city to ensure the power of art, culture and creativity is harnessed for the benefit of Sunderland and its people. Sunderland Culture delivers a city-wide programme of visual and performing arts with communities across the city and in four cultural venues. Venues anchor the cultural offer for the city, attracting audiences from the city and beyond, bringing world-



class art and culture to Sunderland and creating opportunities for people to get involved. Sunderland Culture is registered charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

National Glass Centre’s artistic and audience programmes are part of a city-wide approach which also encompasses heritage, performing arts and events. This joined-up approach continues to benefit students, graduates, and staff in the form of placements, curriculum links, commissions, and employment.

1:3 Current Context

In January 2023, following a specialist review, the University of Sunderland announced it had concluded the cost of repairing and maintaining the existing National Glass Centre building was prohibitively high.

The University of Sunderland began work to relocate a ‘reimagined’ National Glass Centre and discussion focussed on a distributed model which includes the possibility of a dedicated glass gallery, embedding a reimagined academic glass and ceramics provision within the wider arts and design offer across the University of Sunderland estate and creating a city centre ‘making space’.

Whilst the ability to create and make in glass is at the heart of National Glass Centre, as yet there is no firm solution around the creation of a making space.

The loss of a glassmaking facility could have significant negative impact on: Sunderland’s fragile creative economy (Sunderland is a Levelling Up for Culture Place); the ability of artists and makers to work in the city; the heritage of the city and its identity; and the ability of national and international artists to creatively explore the potential of glass.

Partners believe it is important to secure a glassmaking facility to ensure the future of glass as a visual artform, secure the heritage skills for the practice and support a vibrant exhibition programme in the city.

Section 2: Scope of consultancy

2.1: Summary

Sunderland Culture, in partnership with University of Sunderland and Sunderland City Council, and with support from Arts Council England is looking to appoint an independent consultant (or consultants) to support a review of the future of creative glass in Sunderland, including options appraisal and feasibility study.

Key considerations for the review to include –



- Consult with key partners to understand the shared long-term ambitions and expectations for glass making in the city
- Consider the economic impact that glass making has on the cultural economy of the city
- Consult with makers (independent, academic, students, businesses) across different glass making techniques to ensure proposals around a city centre making space are fit for purpose and consider the financial models attached to the operation of this space
- Consider the long-term business case, commercial opportunities and long-term financial feasibility for a new maker space
- Consider the opportunities around skills development through consultation with academic and educational partners
- Consider opportunities with the exhibition and collection of glass in the city, through relationship between the maker space, potential gallery spaces and collections stores, including through the relationship with other cultural venues and institutions in the city
- Consider possible future governance models, through consultation with key city partners
- Consider future opportunities for capital and revenue investment, safeguarding existing investment, including NPO funding and building new funding streams
- Look at other models nationally and internationally such as Stourbridge Glass Museum, Glass Futures, St Helens, JamFactory, STEAMhouse, Glass Hub and EKWC <https://ekwc.nl/en/> and consult with nationally and internationally based artists to discuss what is important about a 'national' venue
- Consider issues of future sustainability and environmental responsibility

2.2: Considerations

1. Making and artists

National Glass Centre is one of the few specialist places in the UK for artists and participants to create, make and produce in glass. In August 2023, two glass centres ceased trading: the internationally renowned North Lands Creative, in Caithness, Scotland, and the Nazeing Glass Works on the border between Hertfordshire and Essex, England. Multiple glassmaking techniques are on the endangered crafts list; the ability to secure skills for the practice will be further compromised without access to specialist facilities.

National Glass Centre currently provides access to the specialist facilities and equipment that are vital to enable Sunderland's skilled community of expert glassmakers to continue to pursue and develop their creative practice. The glassmaking community that has developed around Sunderland and the wider North East, as a legacy of the glassmaking industry, the university and, since 1998, the National Glass Centre, connects one of the largest clusters of artists and makers working in glass in the UK.

National Glass Centre provides sources of income necessary for the members of this community to sustain their creative careers; through academic teaching, delivering public courses and workshops, undertaking commissions, as well as opportunities to sell in the shop and online. National Glass Centre also plays a key role in supporting and developing the careers of national and international artists.



2. Future framework, governance and business model

National Glass Centre needs to grow commercial operations and philanthropic support in order to secure financial sustainability. We want to review our current income generating areas of business (retail/café/learning & engagement/hot glass experiences/venue hire/tenants/commissions/international masterclasses) and develop a robust and sustainable operating model for the future. We want the appointed consultant to help shape a future business plan for a new, independent making space.

3. Academic links

National Glass Centre is currently home to the University of Sunderland's Glass and Ceramics department. There are significant links between academics and students and our front of house operations, programme and projects. Additionally, National Glass Centre is home to Sunderland Creatives, a gallery showcasing the work of University staff and students. The relationship with the University of Sunderland has been critical to the development of National Glass Centre as well as enabling innovation through academic research, supporting the University with the REF, enhancing student employability and developing a skilled 'maker' workforce. We want to understand how we can protect this community in a distributed model pending the University's decision about the relocation of the academic glass and ceramics provision into another University building.

4. Exhibition

We have a number of gallery spaces within National Glass Centre including a main glass gallery, glass collection space, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art gallery, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art collection space, research & balcony gallery, heritage gallery, student gallery and learning and engagement gallery. While there are positive conversations about a gallery space within Sunderland City Council's Culture House, there are not yet solutions for some of the other presentation of works. (As a note - Sunderland Museum Winter Gardens houses a permanent exhibition of glass). The programme across National Glass Centre facilitates the production of new work and pushes the potential of glass as a medium through new technology and by leading local, national and international artists as well as emerging artists and community groups. We want to understand the impact of presenting programme in a space(s) which are not sited with the making space.

5. Collection

National Glass Centre has a formal collection of over 500 pieces and currently has 'working towards' museum accreditation status. Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art has a formal collection of over 500 pieces and there is an aspiration to apply for accreditation of the collection in time. We need a suitable space to store and exhibit the collections. The



collections are owned by the University of Sunderland and we want to explore with partners how the ownership and governance of these collections will look in the future to ensure they are suitably safeguarded and have the opportunity to develop further.

6. Audience and Participation

As part of Sunderland Culture's learning and engagement programme, National Glass Centre ensures creative opportunities are inclusive and accessible to communities across the city. In Sunderland, 60% of the population falls into the lower engaged segments (22/23 Audience Finder data). Current National Glass Centre visitor data shows 7% of visitors have a disability, 40% over 65 and around 25% visit with children under 16. Through the learning programme, we enable inclusive participation glassmaking activities across all age groups, socio economic groups and disability. Partnerships with schools and colleges ensure the facility contributes to widening opportunities for children and young adults.

We want the ability to protect, grow and diversify our audiences both in-venue and digitally and present an offer that is easy to navigate across spaces and venues and works from a commercial perspective.

7. Partnerships

National Glass Centre has extensive national and international partnerships with organisations including V&A, Ruthin Craft Centre, Lisson Gallery, Sadie Coles HQ, Harley Gallery, Compton Verney, Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Glasmuset in Ebeltoft through residencies, co-commissioning, touring and masterclasses. International exchanges with highly skilled glassmakers support the creation of work for exhibition and also to develop National Glass Centre's Collection.

8. Supporting city ambition

Glass and glassmaking is an important part of Sunderland industrial, creative and cultural identity. National Glass Centre attracts over 230,000 visitors in a normal year. 47% of general visitors come from within the Sunderland area, with a further 31% from the wider North East. The remaining 22% come from elsewhere in the UK. We want to ensure that a future facility:

- Continues to play a key role in driving tourism into the city and surrounding areas
- Contributes to Sunderland's sense of place and cultural USP
- Supports Sunderland City Council's aspirations around the development of a city centre artist quarters and city regeneration
- Helps create a vibrant city offer for regional, national and international students
- Supports the University of Sunderland's research agenda



- Provides a career pathway for students studying within the Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries

9. Funding

Arts Council England allocates unrestricted, core funding, on a 3-year cycle, to a cohort of cultural organisations called National Portfolio Organisations. These organisations are seen as at the heart of England's cultural infrastructure and critical to the delivery of Arts Council England's 10-year strategy, Let's Create. National Glass Centre and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art both benefit from Sunderland Culture's NPO funding which totals £634,200 annually. We want to ensure that a 'reimagined' National Glass Centre continues to deliver strongly against Let's Create. National Glass Centre also benefits from additional fundraising to enhance programme and learning and engagement as well as commercial income from the café, shop, hire and additional activities. Fundraising for National Glass Centre is supported by 1 FTE within Sunderland Culture who has a remit for raising funds across the Sunderland Culture portfolio.

10. Useful links:

- <https://sunderlandculture.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Sunderland-Culture-Annual-Review-22-23-FINAL-1.pdf>
- [Priority Places and Levelling Up for Culture Places | Arts Council England](#)
- [Strategy 2020-2030 | Arts Council England](#)
- <https://sunderlandculture.org.uk/our-venues/national-glass-centre/>
- <https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/more/news/story/new-city-centre-home-being-explored-for-reimagined-national-glass-centre-2032>
- <https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/help/corporate-legal/legal-finance/national-glass-centre/>
- <https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/about/about-the-university/how-university-managed/strategic-plan-supporting-statements/strategic-plan/>

2.3: Summary of current key activities and spaces within National Glass Centre

Opened in October 1998, National Glass Centre combines a largescale visitor attraction, with academic research and teaching facilities and creative workspace. The current centre attracts around 230,000 visitors a year and houses:

- 6 dedicated glass galleries: National Glass Centre main gallery, long gallery, collection gallery, research gallery, learning gallery and heritage gallery
- 2 dedicated contemporary art galleries: Northern Gallery Contemporary Art main gallery & Northern Gallery Contemporary Art collection gallery
- 1 student & arts faculty gallery: Sunderland Creatives



- Making spaces: hot glass studios, cold shop, lampwork/lathe and waterjet, access to architectural glass, casting and ceramics resources.
- 4 dedicated learning and engagement studios: including a 'making' learning space within the hot glass studio
- Academic research and teaching spaces: for undergraduate and postgraduate glass and ceramics
- Retail offer
- Café
- Tenant studios: supporting creative business
- National Glass Centre and Northern Gallery Contemporary Art Collection and Collections stores

Section 3: Tender information

3.1 Timetable

- Tender Submission Return Date: Monday 27th February 2024 (midday)
- Interviews: w/c 4th March 2024
- Appointment: 11th March 2024
- Consultancy delivered: 11th March 2024 – 24th May 2024

3.2 Deliverables

- Interim report with indicative options appraisal - 30th April 2024
- Final report with feasibility study and business case – 24th May 2024

3.3 Budget

- Budget range - £10,000 - £12,500 inclusive of VAT and expenses

3.4 Review and governance

Report will be submitted to a working group which includes:

- Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive – Sunderland Culture
- Rachel Smith, Director – National Glass Centre
- Andrea Walters – University of Sunderland
- Catherine Auld – Sunderland City Council
- Sam Peace – Arts Council England
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3.5 Tender Response

Questions to respond to:



1. Please provide a brief summary of the experience you have that is relevant to this consultancy (max 1000 words)
2. Looking at ‘The Future of Creative Glass in Sunderland’ requirements please provide a case study (or studies) of a relevant cultural project completed in the last 8 years providing clear detail of the client brief, the final outputs, overall successes, and costs, along with a brief reference from the client (max 1000 words)
3. Please describe your methodology for approaching this consultancy detailing how you would prioritise the various elements and show us an example of how you would report focused on practical suggestions for the way forward (max 1000 words)
4. Please detail your timetable for completing the work and confirm hourly rate, day rate and overall budget (max 1000 words)

Number of days proposed for this work (please insert)	
Hourly rate (please insert)	
Daily rate (please insert)	
Total budget	

5. Please provide examples of your commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (max 1000 words)
6. Please provide two references of organisations you have previously provided relevant consultancy services to

Please submit all tender responses to naomi.mather@sunderlandculture.org.uk by 12noon on 27th February 2024

3.6 Contacts

- * Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive – Sunderland Culture: rebecca.ball@sunderlandculture.org.uk
- * Rachel Smith, Director – National Glass Centre: rachel.Smith@sunderland.ac.uk
- * Naomi Mather – Governance and Administration Officer: naomi.mather@sunderlandculture.org.uk

