



Collections Information and Access Policy

National Museums NI

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1. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation:

1.1 Museum's statement of purpose

1.1.1 The Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland (hereafter referred to as 'National Museums Northern Ireland') is required under Article 4(1) of the Museums & Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (hereafter referred to as 'the Order'), to 'care for, preserve and add to the objects in its collections'.

1.1.2 The areas of interest to be covered by the organisation are defined in the Order, Article 4 (1) (d), as:

- art, history and science
- the culture and way of life of people; and
- the migration and settlement of people

Article 4 (2) states that 'the Board shall have particular regard to the heritage of Northern Ireland'.

1.1.3 National Museums NI also collects items of international significance that directly relate to the areas of interest outlined above; provide context, both historic and contemporary, for items already in the collection; and, demonstrate Northern Ireland's place in the world and the impact of world events on Northern Ireland.

1.1.4 National Museums NI's vision is:

Celebrate who we are: telling the stories of our past, challenging our present, shaping our future

1.1.5 National Museums NI's mission is:

- Develop, manage and care for our collections to benefit current and future generations
- Make our collections accessible to the widest possible audiences
- Play a leading role in the economic and social wellbeing and future of this place
- Build an organisation where people feel valued.

1.2 Purpose of policy

1.2.1 This policy is part of the National Museums NI's Collections Management framework which consists of:

- Collections Development Policy, 2021
- Collections Information and Access Policy, 2021
- Collections Care and Conservation Policy, 2021

1.2.2 The purpose of the Collections Information and Access Policy is to ensure that National Museums NI fulfils its responsibilities in relation to collections information and access, in line with its statutory obligations, Corporate Strategy and annual business plans, in proportion to resources available.

1.2.3 The constituent museum sites within National Museums NI are:

- Ulster Museum
- Ulster Folk Museum
- Ulster Transport Museum
- Ulster American Folk Park

1.2.4 All National Museums NI sites are Accredited Museums. The Accreditation Scheme is administered by Arts Council England (ACE) which sets nationally agreed standards for UK Museums.

1.2.5 In line with the Accreditation Scheme, this policy details how National Museums NI will:

- improve accountability for collections and collections information
- maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation, collections information and access to collections
- extend access to collections and collections information including facilitating physical, sensory and intellectual access on site and virtually, and by lending and borrowing
- strengthen the security of the collections through accurate collections information

1.3 Policy Implementation

1.3.1 National Museums NI's policies and procedures are informed by relevant legal and ethical frameworks, alongside appropriate national and international standards, as set out in Appendix 1.

1.3.2 Managers should ensure that the Collections Management framework and supporting procedures/plans are followed in the areas for which they are responsible.

The following strategies, plans and procedures, in particular, are relevant to this policy:

- Business Continuity Plan, 2014
- Collections Care Incident Response and Recovery Guidelines, 2012
- Collections Care and Conservation Plan, 2015
- Collections Research Policy, 2019
- Digitisation Strategy, 2010
- Digital Preservation Strategy, 2011

- Disaster Planning: Maintaining Disaster Plans and Preparedness, 2012
- Documentation Plan, 2007, 2014
- Documentation and Loans Procedural Manuals, 2010
- Energy Management Policy, 2014
- Environmental Sustainability Policy, 2018
- Ethics Policy, 2020
- Event Hire Policy: Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, 2014
- Event Hire Policy: Ulster Museum, 2012
- Exhibitions Policy, 2020
- ICT Strategy, 2016-2020
- Intellectual Rights Policy, 2013
- Integrated Pest Management Policy, 2014
- Lending and Borrowing Policy, 2021
- Major Incident and Emergency Plan, 2018
- Working Collections Policy, 2014

1.3.3 Training, where relevant, will be provided to support the delivery of the Collections Information and Access Policy.

1.3.4 All staff should strive to meet the responsibilities outlined within this policy.

1.4 Policy Review

1.4.1 The Collections Information and Access Policy will be published and reviewed at least once every five years.

1.4.2 Date at which this policy is due for review is on or before September 2024.

2. Collections information

2.1 Definition

The National Museums NI interpretation of 'collections information' is aligned to that described in the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 197: 2009:

'information an organisation collects, creates, holds and maintains about its collection and/or collected items'.

2.2 Principles

2.2.1 National Museums NI's collections include physical, analogue and digital items. Information about the collections and associated intellectual property is central to enabling access to the collections.

- 2.2.2 National Museums NI is committed to developing, creating and maintaining good quality and current information about collection items which conforms to appropriate national and international standards wherever possible.
- 2.2.3 This position will enable National Museums NI to account for, and enable access to, all items for which the National Museums NI is legally responsible: collection items, loans to National Museums NI, items on deposit, un-accessioned and previously undocumented items.
- 2.2.4 National Museums NI is committed to ensuring that the Collections Management and integrated Digital Asset Management Systems are the primary tools for creating and managing collections information and items for which National Museums NI is legally responsible.
- 2.2.5 All staff responsible for recording collections documentation must receive appropriate training in Spectrum, relevant data standards and the Collections Management and Digital Asset Management Systems, to ensure the accurate input and retrieval of collections information. All data shall be traceable through an audit trail as to who created or edited it.
- 2.2.6 The technical environment and security of the Collections Management and Digital Asset Management Systems and back up procedures are supported by both the NMNI ICT and Digital Preservation Strategies. National Museums NI is committed to ongoing engagement with its systems providers to ensure that they are properly maintained and fit for purpose, and that collections information is appropriately safeguarded against potential obsolescence of systems.

2.3 Acquisitions

- 2.3.1 An accession record must be created for all items added to the National Museums NI permanent collections describing each item, or group of items, listing them by unique identifying numbers. Senior Managers within the curatorial and collections services areas are responsible for the accession record and related media data of each collection item in the integrated Collections Management and Digital Asset Management systems.

2.4 Cataloguing

- 2.4.1 A catalogue record adhering to agreed National Museums NI -wide data standards should be created as soon as possible after the item has been accessioned. The history of each collection item and a record of any activities associated with it must be retained.
- 2.4.2 Cataloguing is monitored by Collections Information staff. A Documentation Plan to complete cataloguing, address backlog and other gaps is in place and is being progressed as resources permit.

2.4.3 National Museums NI aims, where appropriate, to create a digital image of each collection item or group of items. All new acquisitions should be photographed by a museum photographer or have a 'record shot' taken by a member of staff. The image should be stored in the integrated Collections Management and Digital Asset Management systems. Exceptions may occur such as with some archives (e.g. sound, books or other large documentary collections) where a representative image may be taken.

2.5 Location Control and Audit

2.5.1 The Collections Management and Digital Asset Management Systems are National Museums NI's primary inventory systems. Staff within the curatorial and collections services areas are responsible for creating the inventory level record of each collection item.

2.5.2 The legal status and location of each item for which National Museums NI is responsible will be recorded in the inventory level record.

2.5.3 Documentation will be developed, compliant with the Spectrum standard for the entry and exit of items to the collection.

2.5.4 The Collections Services staff oversee an annual collections audit to verify the physical presence of items in locations as recorded. The collection of firearms is subjected to a 100% audit on an annual basis.

3. Access

3.1 Definition

The National Museums NI interpretation of 'access' is aligned to that described in PAS 197: 2009

Collections' access is the 'right, opportunity or means of finding, using or approaching items and/or information about items'.

3.2 Principles

3.2.1 National Museums NI is committed to delivering public value by offering the widest and most appropriate forms of access to its collections, expertise, facilities and services. In response to benchmarking, advice from professional partners and audience feedback, National Museums NI is actively working to remove or minimise any physical, intellectual, cultural, attitudinal, digital and financial barriers to its collections.

3.2.2 National Museums NI recognises that comprehensive, professional and informative documentation of its collections is what unlocks the potential of these collections. This policy is therefore supported by the National Museums NI Documentation Plan and related policies and procedures.

3.2.3 Through active programmes of audience research and evaluation, National Museums NI strives to gain a better understanding of its current and potential audiences and respond to their expectations and needs in relation to access to collections.

3.2.4 National Museums NI will manage the competing demands of access and long-term collection care in accordance with its Collections Care and Conservation Policy and the Working Collections Policy.

4. Audiences

4.1 National Museums NI defines its audiences using a number of methods including: daily, weekly and monthly admissions analysis; monthly exit surveys; online surveys; quantitative and qualitative research.

4.2 National Museums NI monitors its non-users through the annual Continuous Household Survey Official Statistics published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

4.3 National Museums NI corresponds with its audiences and non-users through a variety of methods, including visitor surveys, comment cards, website enquiries and social media.

4.4 Feedback from both existing audiences and non-users is used by the museum to improve working practices, plan programmes and encourage new and repeat visitation.

4.5 National Museums NI aims to maximise the number and diversity of people visiting its museums. Plans to develop existing audiences are incorporated into National Museums NI's annual business plan. The museum works in partnership with a range of specialist organisations and community groups to broaden its audiences.

5. Evaluation

5.1 National Museums NI prioritises evaluation and uses the results of evaluation to improve its working practices and ensure it is responding to its audiences.

5.2 National Museums NI evaluates exhibitions on an annual basis gathering both qualitative and quantitative data.

5.3 National Museums NI uses the 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework to analyse qualitative data collected through evaluation.

5.4 National Museums NI is committed to disseminating the findings of evaluation through presentations to internal stakeholders, shared reports and discussions with external stakeholders, and increasing the availability of evaluation reports on www.nmni.com.

6. Delivering Access to collections

6.1 National Museums NI delivers access to its collections and collections knowledge in a range of ways. This approach ensures that we cater to our broad and diverse audiences.

6.2 Permanent exhibitions

6.2.1 National Museums NI presents permanent exhibitions across all its sites. These exhibitions include traditional gallery spaces and, in the outdoor museums, historical buildings.

6.2.2 Information about collections on permanent display is provided through a mixture of text panels and labels, audio and visual interpretation, digital interpretation, interactivity and interpretation by Visitor Services staff. Methods used are determined by the nature of the exhibition and collections.

6.3 Temporary exhibitions

6.3.1 National Museums NI produces temporary exhibitions across all its sites and collections disciplines. These exhibitions allow items not normally on display in the permanent exhibitions to be shown to the public. The aims of the temporary exhibition programme, as set out in the National Museums NI Exhibition Policy 2020, are as follows:

- To increase access to and deepen engagement with the collections at our museums and other venues across a balanced audience mix
- To present the collections in new and creative ways that are relevant and appealing to a range of audiences
- To develop appreciation and understanding of our collections and collections knowledge across the three broad disciplines of Art, History and Natural Science
- To provide a platform for National Museums NI to have a voice on contemporary issues and key agendas such as the legacy of the past, health and wellbeing, and the environment
- To provide a platform for National Museums NI to innovate and develop new interpretive techniques to connect audiences with collections
- To share collections research findings that inform and inspire our audiences, with exhibitions that are underpinned by authoritative and scholarly knowledge
- To create exhibitions that generate appeal and interest on the scale that will enhance our museums' reputations as major cultural venues
- To develop and showcase our valued partnerships with other museums, galleries and strategically-aligned organisations, sharing collections and expertise for public benefit

6.3.2 National Museums NI occasionally borrows temporary exhibitions from other organisations, usually accredited museums. These exhibitions are valuable

partnership exercises, allowing National Museums NI staff and the public to benefit from external knowledge and expertise, and bringing significant national and international collections to local audiences who may not otherwise get to see them. Where possible, National Museums NI uses such exhibitions as a springboard for the display and interpretation of additional items from its own collections.

[Section on Temporary Loans Removed]

6.4 Public Events and Participatory Programmes

- 6.4.1 All public events and participatory programmes at National Museums NI strive to take the collections as their starting point, and promote access to them as well as a broader understanding of their themes and contexts.
- 6.4.2 Public events and participatory programmes are one way in which key events, anniversaries and times of year are interpreted by National Museums NI for its audiences. These events are delivered at the main museum sites and non-museum venues.
- 6.4.3 All major new exhibitions at National Museums NI are accompanied by a bespoke programme of public events, to further interpret the collections and their themes for a wider range of audiences.

6.5 Digital Media and Online Resources

- 6.5.1 National Museums NI's annual digitisation programme prioritises the most popular collections and those featured in, or associated with, the exhibition programme.
- 6.5.2 Digitised collections are accessible through National Museums NI's website (nmni.com) where a Collections Online facility and additional online resources provide further public access to a wide range of collections information.
- 6.5.3 National Museums NI uses social media platforms as a means of engagement with collections.

6.6 Stored Collections

- 6.6.1 National Museums NI welcomes visitors wishing to access stored collections.
- 6.6.2 Collection items not on display can be viewed by making an appointment with the relevant curator. Access is subject to resources, health and safety controls, and the condition of the collection items.
- 6.6.3 Levels of access to stored collections are managed by National Museums NI staff.
- 6.6.4 National Museums NI are working to improve the storage of and to increase access to the stored collections through the implementation of the Collections Access Plan.

6.7 Information Services and Enquiries

- 6.7.1 Resources permitting, National Museums NI will respond to public enquiries free of charge.
- 6.7.2 All public enquiries are normally responded to within a period of 20 working days.
- 6.7.3 National Museums NI ensures that all information is processed in accordance with relevant statutory requirements, including the General Data Protection Regulation and the Freedom of Information Act.
- 6.7.4 National Museums NI does not normally supply information on the monetary value of items in the collection, nor does it provide valuations for the public. National Museums NI operates within the *Code of Ethics for Museums: Ethical principles for all who work for or govern museums in the UK*, Museums Association (2016).

7. Photography and Filming

- 7.1 Unless there are specific restrictions, visitors are permitted to photograph or film National Museums NI's displayed collections, for personal use, including for sharing on social media. Visitors may not use flash, a tripod, monopod or supplementary lighting.
- 7.2 No unauthorised filming is permitted in galleries, for reasons of data protection, copyright and potential health and safety.
- 7.3 Photography and video may be prohibited in special exhibitions, selected galleries, or of items on loan to National Museums NI if permission is required from the owner and copyright restrictions apply. Where photography and video are prohibited, explanatory signage is used to inform visitors.
- 7.4 Visitors may gain permission to photograph National Museums NI's stored collections for strictly personal use for non-commercial, non-publication purposes, or for private study.
- 7.5 The Picture Library facilitates all requests for high-resolution, publication-standard images of National Museums NI's sites and collections.

8. Due Diligence

- 8.1 Guidelines issued by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) define due diligence as the necessary precaution that museums take to ensure that they acquire, borrow or lend only ethically acceptable items and reject items that may have been looted or illegally exported.

- 8.2 The application of due diligence procedures is assigned primarily to the collection curator or the exhibition curator(s). Where appropriate, further guidance and advice will be sought from additional curatorial and specialist consultants, such as colleagues from within National Museums NI, other national museums, academic institutions, and major auction houses as well as consulting art loss databases and specialists.
- 8.3 National Museums NI will not acquire or borrow any item unless it is satisfied that the owner/lender has full title and that they or any agent acting for them has full legal authority to enter into an agreement with the Museum. National Museums NI will not proceed should there be any doubt over the legality of ownership, removal from the country of origin, or entry into the UK.
- 8.4 Records and documentation relating to due diligence are to be retained. These include all relevant research notes, correspondence, details of published information, signed loan agreements, lender's evidence and photographic or audio evidence.

9. Indemnity and Insurance

National Museums NI collection items are not covered by the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) and only in exceptional circumstances are they commercially insured whilst on National Museums NI premises or in transit for purposes other than loan. The Museum will therefore pay particular attention to risk management in all collections management activities.

10. Lending

10.1 Principles

- 10.1.1 Under the Museums & Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (Article 4.5, a-b) National Museums NI may lend objects, as defined by the National Museums NI Lending and Borrowing Policy (2021).
- 10.1.2 The conditions under which National Museums NI will lend items are stated in the Lending and Borrowing Policy (2021), available online.

[6 Points on Loans Principles Removed]

- 10.1.3 National Museums NI's Registrar and Assistant Registrar are responsible for the administration of loans, maintaining a central record of all lending and ensuring the conformity of arrangements to Spectrum standard.

Responsibility for the overall administration of outgoing loans, including those for temporary exhibition or displays, rests with the Head of Collections Services supported by Registry and Curatorial staff.

10.2 Long-term lending

10.2.1 National Museums NI approves lending for extended periods as a means of making parts of its collections more widely available to the public.

10.2.2 The conditions under which National Museums NI will lend items, long-term, are stated in the Lending and Borrowing Policy (2021), available online.

[Section on Touring Exhibitions Removed]

11. Borrowing

11.1.1 Under the Museums & Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (Article 4.4, j) National Museums NI may borrow objects, as defined by the National Museums NI Lending and Borrowing Policy (2021).

11.1.2 The conditions under which National Museums NI I will borrow items are stated in the Lending and Borrowing Policy (2021), available online.

11.1.3 Responsibility for the overall administration of incoming loans, including those for temporary exhibition or displays, rests with the Head of Collections Services supported by Registry and Curatorial staff.

National Museums NI's Registrar and Assistant Registrar are responsible for the administration of loans, maintaining a central record of all borrowing and ensuring the conformity of arrangements to Spectrum standard.

11.1.4 Guidelines on the handling of borrowed items and access to cases containing borrowed items must be adhered to by all staff.

11.1.5 All long-term loans will normally be reviewed every three years and should be returned if it is no longer possible or appropriate for the objects to be on display or otherwise accessible to the public.

Appendix 1: Legal, Ethical and Standards Framework

National Museums NI's Collections Management Framework is informed by legislation, ethical codes and appropriate sectoral standards.

A. Legislation applying to all Collections Management Policies

- The Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- The Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- The Treasure Act 1996
- Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003
- The Data Protection Act, 1998
- General Data Protection Regulation, 2018
- The Freedom of Information Act, 2000
- The Requirements of HM Customs & Revenue
- Copyright Act 1911 and 1956
- Copyright and Related Rights Regulations, 2003
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988
- The Requirements of HM Customs & Revenue
- Copyright and Related Rights Regulations, 2003
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2004
- Health at Work (NI) Order 1978
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000
- COSHH: Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, 2002
- Sex Discrimination Order 1976 (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2008
- Employment (NI) Order 2003, the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006
- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Human Rights Act, 1998
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006
- The Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923
- Disposal of Documents Order 1925
- Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Sections 76 Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Schedule 9 Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

B. Ethical codes applying to all Collections Management Policies

- Code of Ethics for Museums, ICOM, 2006 (including the ICOM 'Red List')
- Code of Ethics for Museums, Museums Association, 2016
- Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on collecting and borrowing Cultural Material, DCMS, 2005
- UK Export Licensing for Cultural Goods – Procedures and guidance for exporters of works of art and other culture goods, DCMS, 1997

- Statement of Principles issued by the National Museum Directors Conference on spoliation of works of art during the Holocaust and World War II period, 1998
- UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970
- CITES – ‘Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora’ 1973/79
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Wildlife (NI) Order 1985, Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011
- DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums. Linked to The Human Tissue Act 2004

C. Sectoral standards applying to all Collections Management Policies

- PAS 197:2009: Code of practice for cultural collections management, British Standards Institute
- Spectrum 5.0: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard 2017

D. Collections Information and Access Policy

D.1 Documentation and Cataloguing Standards

- Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002)
- ISAD(g): General International Standard Archival Description, International Council on Archives 2007
- Spectrum 5.0: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard 2017
- Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules ('AACR', Joint Steering Committee, 2nd ed., 2002 revision): international library documentation standard. Superseded by AACR2 and Resource Description and Access ('RDA', 2010, revisions through 2013)

D.2 Lending

- Loans between National and Non-national Museums – New standard and practical guidelines, National Museum Directors' Council 2003
- UK Registrars Group, Courier Guidelines 2nd Edition 2004
- Effective Collections, Simple Loans Administration. Museums Association Supported by Esmée Fairburn Foundation. 1st Edition 2007
- Immunity from Seizure legislation (Part 6 of the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcements Act 2007)
- UK Registrars Group, Standard Facilities Report 2008
- UK Registrars Group, Standard Facilities Report: Display Case supplement 2008
- UK Registrar' Group, Standard Facilities Report: Security Supplement 2008
- Bizot Group Loans Guidelines (revised) 2009
- Government Indemnity Scheme, Guidelines for National Institutions 2012
- Smarter Loans: Principles for lending and borrowing from UK museums, Museums Association 2012

E Collections Care and Conservation Policy

- PAS 198:2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections
- Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries, 2007
- National Museum Directors Conference , Guiding principles for reducing museums' carbon footprint 2010
- Joint IIC - ICOM-CC Declaration on Environmental Guidelines 2014
- BS EN 16790:2016 Conservation of cultural heritage. Integrated pest management (IPM) for protection of cultural heritage
- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections
- BS EN 16853:2017 Conservation of cultural heritage. Conservation process. Decision making, planning and implementation
- BS EN 15946:2011 Conservation of cultural property. Packing principles for transport
- BS EN 16141:2012 Conservation of cultural heritage. Guidelines for management of environmental conditions. Open storage facilities: definitions and characteristics of collection centres dedicated to the preservation and management of cultural heritage
- BS EN 15999-1:2014 Conservation of cultural heritage. Guidelines for design of showcases for exhibition and preservation of objects. General requirements
- PD CEN/TS 16163:2014 Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Guidelines and procedures for choosing appropriate lighting for indoor exhibitions
- BS EN 16853:2017 Conservation of cultural heritage. Conservation process. Decision making, planning and implementation
- BSI PD 5454:2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials
- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections
- RAPT (Risk Awareness Profiling Tool)
- European Confederation of Conservator Restorers Professional Guidelines
- Institute of Conservation (Icon) Code of Conduct 2014