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## **Collections Information and Access Policy**

National Museums Northern Ireland

Approved by Board of Trustees: 20 March 2015

Review Date: on or before March 2020

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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 Northern Ireland (NMNI) 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 NMNI's mission statement is:

To connect the collections, knowledge and public spaces of National Museums Northern Ireland with the widest possible audience to inform and inspire their understanding of the past, the present and the future of people, culture, places, and of the natural environment here and across the world.

### **1.2 Purpose of policy**

1.2.1 This policy is part of the NMNI's Collections Management framework which consists of:

- Collections Development Policy, 2015
- Collections Information and Access Policy, 2015
- Collections Care and Conservation Policy, 2015

1.2.2 The purpose of the Information and Access Policy is to ensure that NMNI 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 NMNI are:

- Ulster Museum
- Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
- Ulster American Folk Park
- Armagh County Museum

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

1.2.5 Armagh County Museum and its collections will be transferred to the new Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council as part of the Northern Ireland Executive's Review of Public Administration. This transfer will take effect from 1 April, 2015

1.2.6 In line with the Accreditation Scheme, this policy details how NMNI 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 NMNI'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:

- Documentation Plan, 2007
- Digitisation Strategy, 2010
- Documentation and Loans Procedural Manuals, 2010
- Loans Policy and Procedures, 2010
- Digital Preservation Strategy, 2011
- Collections Care Incident Response and Recovery Guidelines, 2012
- Disaster Planning: Maintaining Disaster Plans and Preparedness, 2012

- Event Hire Policy: Ulster Museum, 2012
- ICT Strategy, 2012-2015
- Intellectual Rights Policy, 2013
- Business Continuity Plan, 2014
- Documentation Plan (Draft), 2014
- Energy Management Policy, 2014
- Event Hire Policy: Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, 2014
- Integrated Pest Management Policy, 2014
- Major Incident and Emergency Plan, 2014
- Working Collections Policy, 2014
- Collections Care and Conservation Plan (Draft), 2015
- Environmental Sustainability Policy Statement, 2015
- Exhibition Policy (Draft), 2015

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

1.3.4 All NMNI 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 March 2020.

## **2. Collections information**

### **2.1 Definition**

NMNI's interpretation of 'collections information' is aligned to that described in the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 1997: 2009:

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

### **2.2 Principles**

2.2.1 NMNI'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 NMNI 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 NMNI to account for, and enable access to, all items for which the NMNI is legally responsible: collection items, loans to NMNI, items on deposit, un-accessioned and previously undocumented items.
- 2.2.4 NMNI 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 NMNI 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. NMNI 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 NMNI permanent collections describing each item, or group of items, listing them by unique identifying numbers. Senior Managers within the curatorial and collections management 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 NMNI-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 Management staff and the NMNI Documentation Steering Group. A Documentation Plan to complete cataloguing, address backlog and other gaps is in place and is being progressed as resources permit.
- 2.4.3 NMNI 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 NMNI's primary inventory systems. Staff within the curatorial and collections management 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 NMNI 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 Management 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**

NMNI interpretation of 'access' is aligned to that described in PAS 1997: 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 NMNI 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, NMNI is actively working to minimise any physical, intellectual, cultural, attitudinal, digital and financial barriers to its collections.
- 3.2.2 NMNI 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 NMNI Documentation Plan and related policies and procedures.
- 3.2.3 Through active programmes of audience research and evaluation, NMNI 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 NMNI 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 NMNI 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 NMNI monitors its non-users through the annual Continuous Household Survey Official Statistics published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).
- 4.3 NMNI 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 NMNI aims to maximise the number and diversity of people visiting its museums. Plans to develop existing audiences are incorporated into NMNI'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 NMNI prioritises evaluation and uses the results of evaluation to improve its working practices and ensure it is responding to its audiences.
- 5.2 NMNI evaluates exhibitions on an annual basis gathering both qualitative and quantitative data.
- 5.3 NMNI uses the 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework to analyse qualitative data collected through evaluation.
- 5.4 NMNI 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](http://www.nmni.com).

## **6. Delivering Access to collections**

- 6.1 NMNI 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 NMNI 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 NMNI 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. They are also a means of putting more objects on display and increasing audience engagement with collections.

6.3.2 NMNI occasionally borrows temporary exhibitions from other organisations, usually accredited museums. These exhibitions are valuable partnership exercises, allowing NMNI's staff and 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, NMNI uses such exhibitions as a springboard for the display and interpretation of additional items from its own collections.

### **6.4 Touring Exhibitions**

6.4.1 Touring exhibitions offer NMNI an opportunity to increase the visibility of, and access to, its collections, and to engage with audiences, in particular from areas of multiple deprivation, in Northern Ireland.

6.4.2 Exhibitions containing collections material are available to suitable venues. Exhibitions that do not contain collections, such as photographic exhibitions, are available to a wider range of venues.

6.4.3 Touring exhibitions support NMNI's aim to engage with non-traditional audiences, particularly those from areas of multiple deprivation in Northern Ireland.

### **6.5 Public Events**

6.5.1 All public events at NMNI 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.

6.5.2 Public events are one way in which key events, anniversaries and times of year are interpreted by NMNI for its audiences. These events are delivered at the main museum sites and non-museum venues.

6.5.3 All major new exhibitions at NMNI are accompanied by a bespoke programme of public events, to further interpret the collections and their themes for a wider range of audiences.

## **6.6 Digital Media and Online Resources**

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

## **6.7 Stored Collections**

- 6.7.1 NMNI welcomes visitors wishing to access stored collections.
- 6.7.2 Collection items not on display can be viewed by making an appointment with the relevant curator. Access is subject to resources, health and safety issues, and the condition of the collection items.
- 6.7.3 Levels of access to stored collections are managed by NMNI staff.

## **6.8 Information Services and Enquiries**

- 6.8.1 Resources permitting, NMNI will respond to public enquiries free of charge.
- 6.8.2 All public enquiries are normally responded to within a period of 20 working days.
- 6.8.3 NMNI ensures that all information is processed in accordance with relevant statutory requirements, including the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.
- 6.8.4 NMNI does not normally supply information on the monetary value of items in the collection, nor does it provide valuations for the public. National Museums operates within the *Code of Ethics for Museums: Ethical principles for all who work for or govern museums in the UK*, Museums Association (3.18).

## **7. Photography and Filming**

- 7.1 Unless there are specific restrictions, visitors are permitted to photograph or film NMNI'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 are not allowed in special exhibitions, selected galleries, or of items on loan to NMNI. Permission is required from the owner and copyright restrictions may apply. Where photography and video are not permitted, explanatory signage is used to inform visitors.

- 7.4 Visitors may gain permission to photograph NMNI's stored collections for strictly personal use (e.g. research), 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 NMNI's sites and collections.

## **8. Due Diligence**

- 8.1 Guidelines issued by the Department of 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 NMNI, other national museums, academic institutions, and major auction houses as well as consulting art loss databases and specialists.
- 8.3 NMNI 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. NMNI 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**

NMNI collection items are not covered by the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) and only in exceptional circumstances are they commercially insured whilst on NMNI 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) NMNI may lend objects, as defined by the NMNI Loans Policy and Procedures (2010).
- 10.1.2 The conditions under which NMNI will lend items are stated in the Loans Policy and Procedures (2010), available online.

10.1.3 From time to time special restrictions may be placed on the availability of certain collections or categories of items, linked to NMNI projects or operational constraints, for example, if an object is required for exhibition by NMNI, or where items are inaccessible due to storage or gallery projects.

10.1.4 NMNI will normally expect the borrower to cover all associated costs of lending. These include conservation work, mounting, framing, photography, packing, transport, couriers and installation.

10.1.5 NMNI will determine whether to courier items sent on loan according to the following considerations:

- the rarity, significance and fragility of the item
- any special handling or installation requirements
- the anticipated professionalism of staff at the venue
- the number of items in the consignment
- the value of the consignment

10.1.6 NMNI's Registrar is responsible for the administration of loans, maintaining a central record of all lending and ensuring the conformity of arrangements to SPECTRUM standard.

10.1.7 Collection items lent for the public benefit to UK borrowers may be covered under the terms of Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS), provided that the Registrar is satisfied that standards of care, transport, security and fire prevention will, as far as is reasonably practicable, ensure the safety of the objects on loan.

10.1.8 Where the required standards are met, borrowers will be asked to accept liability for the loan, and may be required to insure against this. Items lent to other national museum bodies and government departments will be lent under the same conditions, but at NMNI's own risk subject to paragraph 6.4 (j) of GIS Guidelines (2012).

10.1.9 Items lent to venues which do not qualify for GIS, or another country's indemnity scheme, will be covered by commercial insurance. It is the responsibility of the Registrar to ensure that any insurance or international indemnity provides the appropriate level of cover and that care, security and fire prevention standards are met.

## **10.2 Long-term lending**

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

10.2.2 A long-term loan will normally be reviewed every two years. Valuations will be updated and confirmation sought that the appropriate insurance or indemnity arrangements remain in place and that the conditions of loan continue to be satisfied.

### **10.3 Touring exhibitions**

NMNI's Registrar is responsible for the administration of touring exhibitions, maintaining a central record of all lending and ensuring the conformity of arrangements to SPECTRUM standard.

## **11. Borrowing**

11.1.1 Under the Museums & Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (Article 4.4, j) NMNI may borrow objects, as defined by the NMNI Loans Policy and Procedures.

11.1.2 All loans taken into NMNI are governed by specific terms and conditions included in a Loan Agreement that makes clear the respective responsibilities and rights of owner and NMNI.

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

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**

NMNI's Collections Management framework is informed by legislation, ethical codes and appropriate sectoral standards.

### **A. Legislation applying to all Collections Management Policies**

- Copyright Act 1911 and 1956
- The Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923
- Disposal of Documents Order 1925
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, as amended
- Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- The Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- The Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009)
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, as amended
- Fair Employment & Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Museums and Galleries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Section 75, Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Sections 76 Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Schedule 9 Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003
- Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003
- Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2003
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended DDA (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, as amended
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, The Wildlife (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
- The Requirements of HM Customs & Revenue

### **B. Ethical codes applying to all Collections Management Policies**

- UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, ratified Nov 2002
- CITES – 'Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora' 1973/79
- Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions, National Museum Directors Conference 1998
- Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on collecting and borrowing Cultural Material, DCMS 2005
- Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, DCMS 2005
- Code of Ethics for Museums, Museums Association 2008

- UK Export Licensing for Cultural Goods – Procedures and guidance for exporters of works of art and other culture goods, Arts Council England 2011
- ICOM code of Ethics for Museums 2013 (including the ICOM 'Red List')

### **C. Sectorial standards applying to all Collections Management Policies**

- PAS197:2009: Code of practice for cultural collections management, British Standards Institute
- SPECTRUM 4.0: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard 2011

### **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 4.0: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard 2011
- 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

#### **D.3 Collections Care and Conservation Policy**

- European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Professional Guidelines 2002
- National Museum Directors Conference, guiding principles for reducing museums' carbon footprint 2010
- Benchmarks in Collections Care 2.0, Alex Dawson (ed.), Museums, Libraries and Archives 2011
- PAS 198:2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections, British Standards Institute

- PD 5454:2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials British Standards Institute
- Joint International Institute for Conservation (IIC) of Historic and Artistic Works – International Council of Museums (ICOM), Conservation Committee (CC) Declaration on Environmental Guidelines 2014
- Institute of Conservation (Icon) Code of Conduct and Professional Standards 2014
- RAPT (Risk Awareness Profiling Tool), [www.raptonline.org.uk](http://www.raptonline.org.uk)