

Document Name	Collections Information and Access
Document Type	Policy
Document Owner	Yvonne Brownlee Head of Collections Services
Executive Team Date of Approval	14 May 2015
Board of Trustees Date of Approval (if applicable)	10 June 2015
Document Version No.	5.0 (updated 31 March 2026) Approved: 09 April 2026 Approved by: Executive Team
Equality Impact Assessment Completion	Date completed: 31 March 2026 Completed by: Yvonne Brownlee Head of Collections Services
Equality Impact Assessment Sign- Off	Date: 09 April 2026 By: Dr Sam Alberti, Director of Collections
Date of Next Review	31 March 2029
Related Documents	Collections Care and Conservation Policy, 2015 (updated 2026) Information Security Policy, 2020 (updated 2024)

Version Control

Version	Date	Status	Prepared by	Reason for amendment
1.0	9 September 2015	Final	Heather Caven, Head of Collections Services	
2.0	25 October 2018	Final	Chante St Clair Inglis, Head of Collections Services	Updated to reflect changes in relevant sector standards, Museum policies and strategies
3.0	1 February 2021	Final	Chante St Clair Inglis, Head of Collections Services	Updated to reflect changes in Museum policies and strategies
4.0	4 September 2023	Final	Chante St Clair Inglis, Head of Collections Services	Updated to reflect changes in Museum policies and strategies
5.0	11 February 2026	Draft	Yvonne Brownlee, Head of Collections Services	Updated following scheduled review

1. Purpose of Policy

- 1.1. Under the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, the Board of Trustees of National Museums Scotland is responsible for the care, preservation, and development of the object, archive and library collections and for making them available to the public for exhibition, study, and research.
- 1.2. This policy sets out the principles by which National Museums Scotland will ensure effective management of collections information and access to collections to:
 - Improve accountability for the collections
 - Meet or exceed minimum professional standards in collections documentation procedures and collections information
 - Extend access to collections onsite, online as well as lending and borrowing collections
 - Strengthen the security of the collections through accurate collections information
 - Enable staff to manage collections in National Museums Scotland's care
 - Improve risk management for the collections.
- 1.3. National Museums Scotland is committed to maintaining the standards laid down in the Arts Council England Museums Accreditation Scheme, which defines good practice and sets nationally agreed baseline standards for museums in the UK. All National Museums Scotland museums are fully accredited by Arts Council England. As required by the Arts Council England Museums Accreditation Scheme, which defines good practice and sets nationally agreed baseline standards for museums in the UK, National Museums Scotland will maintain the primary procedures from Spectrum 5.1: the UK Collections Management Standard (Collections Trust), which represents a common understanding of good practice for collections management in museums and supports the activities involved in managing physical and digital collections and their associated information.
- 1.4. National Museums Scotland is committed to providing and maintaining systems that enable the recording and retrieval of collections information. Currently National Museums Scotland operates a Collections Information System (CIS), Axiell Collections, which manages object, archive and library collections, a Digital Asset Management System (DAMS), Piction, a Library Management System (LMS), Koha, and a Research Repository of outputs.
- 1.5. National Museums Scotland's approach to the security of information assets and its CIS are set out in the Information Security Policy, 2019 (updated 2024). This approach conforms to the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

2. Collections Information Principles

- 2.1. National Museums Scotland's Collections Information System (CIS) and Digital Asset Management Systems (DAMS) are the primary tools for creating and managing collections information. National Museums Scotland is committed to creating and maintaining good quality information and accurate location information for object, archive and library collections, which conforms to the Spectrum primary procedures, archive standards and guidelines (ISAD(G)), and

guidelines and national and international standards, as far as possible. See Appendix A.

- 2.2. This enables accountability for items that National Museums Scotland is legally responsible for: permanent object, archive and library collections items, incoming loan items, items on deposit, un-accessioned and previously undocumented items.
- 2.3. This policy applies to information about both physical and digital object, archive and library collections in the care of National Museums Scotland.
- 2.4. All staff responsible for creating and managing collections information receive training in the relevant data standards and appropriate collections systems to enable accurate input and retrieval of collections information. In accordance with National Museums Scotland's collections management procedures all information will be accurately input in a timely way and traceable through an audit trail as to who created and edited it.
- 2.5. Documentation backlogs will be identified, prioritised and addressed with targeted milestones, reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
- 2.6. Born digital collections will be catalogued in the CIS, in the same way as physical items, and the digital 'master' or item, managed and preserved as a sustainable digital asset.
- 2.7. National Museums Scotland has an ongoing and prioritised programme to capture images of object, archive and library collections as resources permit (this includes photographing, 3D modelling, and scanning). These digital assets are catalogued, stored, and accessed in the appropriate system, with sufficient metadata to make them discoverable.
- 2.8. National Museums Scotland has an ongoing and prioritised programme of collections auditing carried out to verify the locations of collection items as recorded in CIS. National Museums Scotland will audit collection items and records in line with statutory requirements where applicable and a risk-based approach to other items. Documentation about the object, archive and library collections is made available for inspection by National Museums Scotland's auditors upon request.
- 2.9. National Museums Scotland will undertake regular reviews of the CIS, DAMS and LMS to ensure they are fit for purpose and that collections information is appropriately safeguarded against potential future obsolescence of the systems.

3. Collections Access

- 3.1. National Museums Scotland is committed to enabling access to object, archive and library collections, physically and digitally, in accordance with its Strategic Plan 2022-2027.
- 3.2. To enable access, appreciation and understanding of the object, archive and library collections, National Museums Scotland provides access to its collections through:
 - Permanent galleries and temporary exhibitions and displays at National Museums Scotland sites

- Exhibitions at external venues
 - The use of handling collections
 - A range of learning programmes
 - Collections study and research facilities, and enquiry services
 - A programme of national and international loans
 - Content on the National Museums Scotland websites, including Search our Collections functionality
 - The use of social media channels
 - Publication of open data
 - Volunteering programmes.
- 3.3. National Museums Scotland welcomes visits to view collections on display in galleries and exhibitions during the opening hours of National Museums Scotland's museums and in line with booking arrangements (where applicable) and conditions of entry advertised on each museum's website.
- 3.4. Object, archive and library collections not on display may be viewed upon appointment. Access to collections that are culturally sensitive, hazardous to health or subject to legislative requirements, conditions of deposit, or significant security, or collections care considerations may be restricted. The competing demands of access and long-term care will be managed in accordance with the outcome of collections care risk assessments. Appropriate levels of access are monitored and approved by the Director of Collections and Collections Heads of Department, who have the right to refuse access at their discretion to protect the collections or for other valid reasons.
- 3.5. National Museums Scotland provides online access to collections through National Museums Scotland websites and via 'Search our Collections'. These are updated as new information becomes available, and where no rights or data restrictions apply. In rare circumstances, it is not appropriate to publish online a photograph of an object, or an object record. These circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis, with the approval of the Director of Collections.
- 3.6. National Museums Scotland also seeks to extend its reach to online audiences by sharing information about its object, archive and library collections via other free online platforms as resources permit. Arrangements to use collection information for commercial purposes can be made through National Museums Scotland Enterprises.
- 3.7. National Museums Scotland staff have a duty of care to protect sensitive or confidential collections information, in accordance with legal regulations. All third-party requests for information will be considered in terms of compliance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Data Protection Act 2018, UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Requests will be reviewed for confidential data, such as donor information, environmental information, or site details, on a case-by-case basis, and in accordance with applicable legislation and any legal agreements or conditions of gift.

4. Collections Due Diligence

- 4.1. National Museums Scotland follows the guidelines issued by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which define due diligence as the necessary

precaution that museums take to ensure that they acquire, borrow or lend only ethically acceptable material and reject items that may have questionable title, have been looted or illegally exported.

- 4.2. National Museums Scotland will not acquire or borrow any object, archive or library collection item unless it is satisfied that the owner/lender has good legal title and they, or any agent acting for them, have full legal authority to enter into an agreement with National Museums Scotland.
- 4.3. The Director of National Museums Scotland has overall responsibility, which is delegated to the Director of Collections and Heads of Collection Departments, for ensuring that the appropriate due diligence checks for collections are carried out.

5. Reuse of Collection Information

- 5.1. National Museums Scotland seeks to enable audiences' reuse of images of object, archive and library collections and other content to increase reach and promote the collections. We aim to achieve this through adoption of a range of measures outlined in our Intellectual Property Policy that enable reuse by audiences.
- 5.2. Whilst all reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that content that infringes the law will not be present on National Museums Scotland's website or any publication or broadcast to which National Museums Scotland has supplied content from its collections, and as outlined in our Intellectual Property Policy, reuse of the collections information is made at the user's own risk.

6. Lending and Borrowing Collection Items

- 6.1. The Board of Trustees is authorised to lend and borrow collections from other public institutions or private individuals under the terms of the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985 and the Museums and Galleries Act 1992.
- 6.2. National Museums Scotland lends and borrows collections to and from venues across Scotland, the UK and abroad for the purpose of exhibition and display. Lending and borrowing plays an important role in enabling access to collections and engaging a wider audience.
- 6.3. National Museums Scotland also lends and borrows collections in support of research and knowledge exchange.

7. Policy Implementation

- 7.1. Managers in all relevant departments will ensure that the Collections Information and Access Policy and supporting procedures for the management of the collections and access to the collections are followed in the areas for which they are responsible.
- 7.2. National Museums Scotland's Operational Plan sets out group-wide actions and resources for the current year to deliver progress against National Museums Scotland's Strategic Priorities. The plan identifies key strategic risks and actions for their mitigation and is reviewed annually.

8. Collection Information policy implementation

- 8.1. All colleagues responsible for creating and managing collection information receive the appropriate training to create documentation in accordance with National Museums Scotland's procedures. Collection Information is recorded in an accurate and timely way that is retrievable and auditable.
- 8.2. The Head of Collections Services is responsible for ensuring that collections management training is available, and managers in all relevant departments are responsible for ensuring that their team members receive training.
- 8.3. The Head of Collections Services is responsible for ensuring a periodic review of relevant Collection Systems is undertaken to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- 8.4. The Head of Collections Services is responsible for ensuring that regular internal audits, including location audits, of the collections are planned and carried out. There will be audits of collections management information relating to collections with associated legal or statutory requirements (including controlled drugs, radioactive objects, human remains and firearms) at frequencies in line with legal and regulatory requirements.
- 8.5. The plan for audits will be set out annually in the National Museums Scotland's Collections Audit Plan. Results of audits will be reviewed by the Director of Collections and reported to the Board of Trustees.
- 8.6. The National Museums Scotland Documentation Plan identifies collections documentation backlogs and outlines the actions that will be taken to address them, as resources permit.

9. Collection Access policy implementation

- 9.1. The Open Access Steering Group is responsible for implementing the Open Access Plan.
- 9.2. The Head of Digital Media and the Head of Collections Services are responsible for ensuring online access to collections information and data where appropriate.
- 9.3. The Head of Collections Services and Keepers are responsible for ensuring access to the collections.
- 9.4. The Information & Knowledge Management team is responsible for ensuring that public requests for information are considered in line with legislation.
- 9.5. Arrangements to use existing collections information (images) for commercial purposes may be made through National Museums Scotland Enterprises (NMSE) Limited.

Appendix A

National Museums Scotland's Collections Information and Access Policy is informed by national and international legislation, ethical codes, and appropriate sector standards. The following list is not exhaustive, and it is recognised that they may change during the life of the policy.

Legislation

The Scottish National Heritage Act, 1985 and 1998
The Museums and Galleries Act, 1992 (as amended 1993)
The Public Records Acts, 1958, as amended 1967
The Data Protection Act, 2018
UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act, 2002
Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, UNESCO, 1970
CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), 1973 (as amended 1979 and 1983)
The Requirements of HM Customs & Revenue
Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, published by DCMS in 2005
Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museums, published by MGS in 2011
Copyright Act 1911 and 1956
Copyright and Related Rights Regulations, 2003
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988
Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act, 2003
Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 (as amended)
Equality Act, 2006
Human Rights Act, 1998
Race Relations Act, 1976
Racial and Religious Hatred Act, 2006
Sex Discrimination Act, 1975
Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
The Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulation, 2004
COSHH: Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, 2002
Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2014.

Ethical codes

Code of Ethics for Museums, ICOM, 2006 (including the ICOM 'Red List')
Code of Ethics for Museums, Museums Association, 2025
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, Arts Council England, 2021
Statement of Principles issued by the National Museum Directors Conference on spoliation of works of art during the Holocaust and World War II period, 2021
Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) Code of Ethics (updated March 2024)

Sector standards

SPECTRUM

Government Indemnity Scheme Guidelines for National Institutions, Arts Council England, 2016.

ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, International Council On Archives, 2nd edition, 2001.

PAS 197:2009: Code of practice for cultural collections management, BSI and Collections Trust