

Acquisition and Disposal Policy

Name of museum

University of Aberdeen Museums

Name of governing body

University Court

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body

7th December 2009

Date at which this policy is due for review

29th September 2014

1. Museum's statement of purpose and key aims

Statement of purpose: The University's museums aim for excellence in teaching, research and community engagement. They bring collaboration and creativity to the management of the University's collections for the benefit of all users.

Key aims:

1. **Community engagement** - To engage and consult with our communities and develop relevant partnerships, anticipating and being responsive to changing needs and aspirations.
2. **HE teaching** - To encourage and support the use of the collections in high quality undergraduate and postgraduate teaching within their own fields and in other disciplines.
3. **Research** - To promote and facilitate research access to the collections by academic staff, students and independent researchers, and to undertake research on the collections.
4. **Educational outreach** - To play a leading role in public engagement and offer learning opportunities for formal and informal groups across North-East Scotland and beyond.
5. **Interpretation** - To offer opportunities to engage with and enjoy the collections through permanent displays and regularly changing exhibitions that meet the highest standards of scholarship and critical thinking, both on campus and elsewhere, as well as through our web sites, catalogues and other resources.
6. **Collection development** - To develop the collections through selective acquisition and disposal and to enhance the standards of curation, documentation and conservation afforded to the collections.

7. **Service management** – To manage our services and resources creatively and effectively.

2. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and /or geographic areas to which the collections relate

The University's museums and collections are internationally renowned and the entire collection has been Recognised to be of national significance to the Scottish nation in 2007. The collections are the product of hundreds of years of collecting, driven by the research and teaching activities of staff and the exploits and generosity of graduates and friends. Holding items acquired by the University and its constituent institutions from their foundation in 1495, museums were established in the later 18th century in King's College and Marischal College. These two colleges were fused in 1860 to form the University of Aberdeen.

The museums/collections are:

- Anatomy Museum
- Geological Collections
- Herbarium
- Marischal Museum
 - Scottish history and archaeology
 - European and Mediterranean archaeology
 - Non-Western ethnography and archaeology
 - Fine Art
 - Numismatics
- Natural Philosophy Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments
- Pathology and Forensic Medicine Collection
- Zoology Museum

Details of the periods of time and geographic areas to which the collections relate can be found in Appendices A-G of this policy, which cover the individual collections.

As well as the accessioned collections, several museums/collections also care for separately listed collections that do not form part of their main accessioned collections. Items in these collections may be a working resource, such as a teaching or handling collection, rather than a permanent museum collection, and in such cases this policy will not apply.

3. Criteria governing future acquisition policy including the subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas and any collections which will not be subject to further acquisition.

The general principles and priorities for collecting are:

- to preserve important material for the benefit of the University and the wider community
- to build on the existing strengths of the collections
- to collect material to support teaching, research and public engagement.

Under normal circumstances only items which are accompanied by adequate documentation as to their origin and method of collection will be acquired.

All collections may be subject to further acquisition. The specific criteria governing future acquisition policy in the University's museums/collections (including subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas) are stated in the following appendices:

[Appendix A – Anatomy Museum](#)

[Appendix B – Geological Collections](#)

[Appendix C – Herbarium](#)

[Appendix D – Marischal Museum](#)

[Appendix E – Natural Philosophy Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments](#)

[Appendix F – Pathology and Forensic Medicine Collection](#)

[Appendix G – Zoology Museum](#)

There are overlaps between most of the collections. While the individual policies in the Appendices indicate the general and specific areas of collecting for the collections, there will be occasions when circumstances suggest that flexibility be retained in the accessioning of material into one collection or another. The close working relationship between the collections makes this not only possible, but desirable, and present work towards a common catalogue covering all the collections will make such materials easily discoverable.

There are also overlaps with the holdings of the University's Special Libraries and Archives (which will also be searchable on the common catalogue). If archival material (handwritten and printed documents, drawings, photographs, etc.) that relates to the themes of the University's museum collections is acquired by the University, it may be kept in separate collections archives within the museums, retained in individual object history files, offered to the University's Special Libraries and Archives where it should be held in perpetuity, or accessioned into the permanent museum collections, as appropriate. This policy will only apply to such material if a decision is made to accession it into the permanent museum collections.

Likewise, it is not appropriate that all works of art, gifts or other items acquired by the University be accepted into the University's museum collections. Instead, they will be held in identified collections that are not covered by this policy, on the basis that they may have a finite use within the University.

4. Limitations on collecting

a. The University recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

b. Items offered to the University as gifts or bequests will not normally be accepted if they are subject to any restrictive covenant or special conditions. A general exception to this rule will be deemed to exist in respect of restrictive covenants or conditions intended only to assure the permanent protection of the item concerned in the University's collections. The University Court may be asked to approve the acquisition of specific items to which unusual conditions are attached.

c. Items will not normally be accepted into the collections on loan. No item will be accepted on 'permanent loan', a term which has no legal status. In exceptional cases, items of major importance that fall within the scope of this Policy may be accepted on long, fixed-term, loan, the period to be agreed in writing between the curator and owner

(or representative). Where the term of a loan has expired, it may be renewed or extended for further finite periods, at the discretion of both the owner and the curator. In exceptional circumstances the University may ask for a contribution from the lender towards the upkeep of items on loan.

5. Collecting policies of other museums

The University will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference is made to the following museum(s):

- The National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh
- The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow
- Aberdeen Art Gallery
- The Gordon Highlanders Museum, Aberdeen
- Grampian Hospitals Art Collection, Aberdeen
- The Grampian Police Museum, Aberdeen

- In accordance with the North-East Museums Concordat (see appendix H), museums directly governed by:

- Aberdeen City Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- The Moray Council
- The Moray Society

6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

Museum Galleries Scotland will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum itself (the University Court), having regard to the interests of other museums.

8. Acquisition procedures

a. The University museums will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the University can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

b. In particular, the University museums will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph

'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).

c. In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, the University will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

d. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the University museums will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

e. The University museums will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

In Scotland, under the laws of *bona vacantia* including Treasure Trove, the Crown has title to all ownerless objects including antiquities. Scottish archaeological material cannot therefore be legally acquired by means other than by allocation to the University of Aberdeen by the Crown. Where the Crown chooses to forego its title to a portable antiquity, a Curator or other responsible person acting on behalf of the University Court can establish that valid title to the item in question has been acquired by ensuring that a certificate of 'No Claim' has been issued on behalf of the Crown.

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e will only be because the University is either:

acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or

acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or

acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

In these cases the University will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

g. Since the University's Anatomy Museum and Pathology collections hold or intend to acquire anatomical specimens dating from 1988 onwards, the University recognises that these museums will need to be on the list of museums in the Anatomy (Specified Persons and Museums for Public Display (Scotland) Order 2006, or to have obtained a licence under the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006.

Since the University's Marischal Museum, Zoology Museum, Anatomy Museum and Pathology Collections hold or intend to acquire human remains from any period pre-

dating 1988, they will follow the guidelines in the “Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museums” to be issued by Museums Galleries Scotland.

The University’s Geology collections, Herbarium, and Natural Philosophy collections do not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

h. Wherever appropriate, the University will aim to acquire relevant intellectual property rights associated with acquired objects.

i. A curator, as the University Court’s representative, will normally have delegated authority and responsibility for the acceptance or rejection of gifts or bequests to a collection, for soliciting gifts of material for the collections within the terms of this policy, and for making purchases of material in accordance with this Policy and within the University Court’s normal standing orders.

j. Advice and criticism about the use of the collections from any source will be acknowledged, respected and considered. Whether at the time of acquisition or later, if the critique derives from representatives of the original owners, the appropriate curator will consider it with proportionality greater sensitivity.

9. Spoliation

The University will use the statement of principles ‘Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period’, issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission. (See Appendix I: responding to requests for return).

10. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

The University Court, acting on the advice of the museum’s professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the “Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museums” to be issued by Museums Galleries Scotland), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The University will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 12a-12d, 12g and 12s below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate. (See Appendix I: responding to requests for return).

11. Management of archives

As the University museums hold archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, the University Court will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

12. Disposal procedures

Disposal preliminaries

a. The governing body (the University Court) will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

b. By definition, the museums have a long-term purpose and hold collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the museum’s collection.

c. The University will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.

d. When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the University will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

Motivation for disposal and method of disposal

e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 12g-12s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.

f. The University museums will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

The disposal decision-making process

g. The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including the public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. External expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.

Responsibility for disposal decision-making

h. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (normally in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum (the University Court) acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.

The exception to this is that as the proper disposal of human remains in the Anatomy collection donated under the Anatomy Acts is the legal duty of the Licensed Teacher of Anatomy, in accordance with the procedures of the Anatomy Act (1984) as amended by the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act (2006), in exceptional circumstances the Licensed Teacher may be required to dispose of human remains and to have legal responsibility for the decision. All such disposals will be reported to the University Court.

Use of proceeds of sale

i. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from MLA.

j. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

Disposal by gift or sale

k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

m. The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the University may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

Disposal by exchange

n. The nature of disposal by exchange means that the museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The governing body (University Court) will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

o. In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or unaccredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 12a-12d and 12g-12h will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 12p-12s.

p. If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.

q. If the exchange is proposed with a non-accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the University will make an announcement in the Museums Journal and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

r. Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the museum's collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

Documenting disposal

s. Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and

proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on deaccession and disposal.