UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY COLLECTIONS

Access Policy

1   UNIVERSITY COLLECTIONS PURPOSE
Since 1495, the University of Aberdeen has been open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others. University Collections supports this foundational purpose, aiming to curate, enable, innovate, and promote access for all to the University's internationally important archives, rare books and museum collections for teaching, research and public engagement.

2   CONTEXT, AIMS AND POLICIES
2.1   Ethical and regulatory context
Working within the University's foundational purpose of being 'Open to all in the pursuit of truth in the service of others', the policies and forward plan of University Collections are in line with the University of Aberdeen's strategic plan*, Aberdeen 2040*, the *University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy*, *Dignity at Work and Study - Bullying, Harassment & Discrimination Polic*y, and its *Antiracism Strategy.* These aim to ensure that everyone in the University community, including staff, students, contractors and visitors, can reach their full potential through the freedom to be themselves, be authentic and not seek to conceal elements of their identity to avoid unfair treatment. University Collections recognises the many barriers to access, whether cultural, financial, psychological, physical or social, so aims to go further than the legal and regulatory requirements to enable access. This includes meeting the requirements of the *Equality Act* 2010, *Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act* 2002, Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 and other laws, while following the policies and procedures of the University of Aberdeen, including the *Data Protection Policy*, the *Information Requests Policy*, *Events and Speaker Policy, Digital Accessibility Policy, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy*, *Information Security Policy*, *Neurodiversity Equality Policy,* and the *Safeguarding Policy.* University Collections also works within professional codes of ethics, notably the Archives and Records Association *Code of Ethics* (2024), *Museums Association Code of Ethics* (2025), International Council of Museums *Code of Ethics for Museums* (2004), *ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums* (2013), the CILIP *Ethical Framework* (2018), and the Institute of Conservation's *Ethical Guidance* (2020) and the Museums Galleries Scotland *Guidelines for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museum Collections* (2011).

2.2   Principles for access
University Collections is committed to enabling equality of access and transparency. This includes providing access to the collections, facilities and services for as wide a range of people as possible. It also includes enabling learning, creativity and enjoyment related to the collections and associated ideas, and engaging critically with the University's historic legacy. University Collections is committed to reducing the barriers to access for people with disabilities in all its work, following University policy such as the Inclusivity and Accessibility in Education Framework and the Accessibility Statement for the University of Aberdeen Website. and specialist advice from expert staff in the university and external organisations. Information about physical access to venues will be made available on the University Collections web pages. A variety of approaches will be taken to ensure that access is equitable, recognising the impact of intersectionality and that the needs of people vary. Embedding an inclusive approach will not only benefit those with specific needs, but also ensure that everyone benefits from services, processes and programmes designed with access in mind.

2.3 Aims for access
The work of University Collections will be guided by five aims which underpin its policies, procedures and plans that enable access to the collections for everyone. A risk-based approach will aim to balance these principles with the aim of maximising access to the collections. Controls and mitigations will be identified as part of risk assessments and

operating procedures for specific venues and activities, with training provided for all staff and volunteers involved to ensure effective implementation. The University Risk Register Template will be used. The principles, in no order, are:

- Care for the collections
- Develop the collections
- Enable excellent research and tertiary education
- Ensure a caring, responsive, and professional environment
- Provide excellent and accessible public engagement

2.4   *University Collections Policies*
Alongside the Collections Access Policy, the work of University Collections follows a series of specific policies:
- Collection Development Policy
- Collections Care, Conservation and Security Policy
- Collections Documentation Policy and Procedures
- Research and Academic Engagement Policy
- Digitisation Policy.
- Engagement, Exhibitions and Events Policy.
- Volunteering Policy

The University Collections *Forward Plan 2025-30* identifies priorities for work to be taken in support of these policies.

3   RESEARCH ACCESS TO THE COLLECTIONS
3.1   *Sharing information about the collections*
The archive, museum and printed material catalogues, information factsheets, digital exhibitions and collections, and images of selected items are available on the University Collections web pages. For the printed collections there is also information (searchable and browsable) on the composition of the collection and its division into chronological and named collections. Information about the collections is also available through other means, such as publications and annual reports to the National Register of Archives. University Collections supports the harvesting of data for delivery on external portals such as the Archives Hub, the JISC Library Hub Discover, Museum Data Service, ArtUK, and the English and Universal Short Title Catalogues.

3.2   *Enabling access for research*
Collections research encompasses a wide range of activities by many different people, and all research is encouraged The *Research and Academic Engagement Policy* outlines how good research practice is enabled and managed, and how research can lead to greater understanding of the collections and opportunities for engagement and impact. The Collections Research Room is the principal venue for research relating to the collections, with details of how enquiries are managed and collections access managed given in Appendix 1: Collections Research Room.

3.3   *Access restrictions*
Access to the collections follows the *Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act* 2002 and a commitment to ensuring that access is as unrestricted as possible. Archive material which contains personally sensitive or confidential information is not generally available for consultation and in such cases access follows the University's *Data Protection Policy* which is consistent with the *Data Protection Act* 2018 and the *UK General Data Protection Regulation* and also the *Information Requests Policy*. Some material is governed by an existing agreement between the owner of a collection and University Collections that restricts access. In those exceptional cases, that information will be recorded in the relevant catalogue entry, and the restrictions explained to researchers. Restrictions may also apply to copying and publishing material for which the University does not have copyright or other intellectual property rights. Access to the medical collections (Anatomy and Pathology) is also restricted by the Anatomy Acts and the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006.

Access to some items may be restricted by University Collections staff if it is likely that it will be damaged by being handled, or if access would raise significant security or logistical issues. Where access might raise ethical concerns, such as access to material considered to be sacred, this will be discussed with the researcher. If a surrogate copy (such as a digital copy) exists, it will be offered for use by researchers in preference to the original. Consideration will be given to prioritising conservation treatment of such material. Physical access to, or digitisation of, items which are incompletely listed, catalogued and arranged may also be restricted if it is likely that access would be likely to disrupt the order, and thus understanding, of that collection. Such restrictions will be avoided if possible and will be explained to researchers.

3.4   Charges and fees
The principle of free access to the collections underpins the support that University Collections provides for researchers. Research involving significant staff time or other resources, beyond those required by simple, standard, occasional research, should be co-designed with University Collections to ensure costs will be adequately covered, often through external funding. This will normally include access that requires more than two days of staff time dedicated to supporting the research, or digitisation (see the *Digitisation Policy* and the *Research and Academic Engagement Policy*).

4   ENGAGEMENT, INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION
The collections underpin a wide range of activities that make the collections and information about them accessible to a wide range of audiences. This includes free exhibitions open to all, public talks and events (which are usually free to attend), publications, workshops for schools, support given to researchers, contributions to university courses, loans for display in other institutions, social media and collaborative projects. A priority will be given to work with people who have historically been marginalised from engagement with the collections, particularly students and those living locally to the university, and communities of origin/source communities who have links to specific collections. Such activities are in support of the University of Aberdeen's strategic objectives, and recognise the regional, national and international responsibilities that drive from the collections. This work is guided by the *Engagement, Exhibitions and Events Policy* and the *Research and Academic Engagement Policy*.

5   SERVICE IMPROVEMENT, FEEDBACK AND REVIEW
University Collections is committed to providing the highest possible standard of service both online and in person, and welcomes all comments to ensure that service continues to improve. Staff will aim to resolve any issues quickly and informally, while feedback and complaints should follow the University's *Complaints Handling Procedure*.

6   POLICY RESPONSIBILITY AND REVIEW
This operational policy will be reviewed at least annually by the Management Team of University Collections, with changes to be approved by the Directorate of Digital and Information Services Leadership Team. Associated forms and guidance will be consistent with this operational policy, and are approved by the Management Team of University Collections.

Approved by Directorate of Digital and Information Services Leadership Team, 13 January 2026.