

# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## UNIVERSITY COLLECTIONS

### Collections Care, Conservation and Security 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. The University's Collections support 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 AIMS

A fundamental duty of the University is the care of its collections for the benefit of current and future generations. Collections care is the management of all risks to the collections, both by University Collections staff and others, and underpins all policies and activities. A preventive conservation strategy is the primary objective in the approach of University Collections to collections care, supported by interventive approaches where necessary. A collections care plan will be maintained, with associated operating procedures for each relevant venue to include emergency plans and housekeeping procedures. The duty of care towards collections, visitors and staff also involves a concern for security and an ability to respond to emergencies, which is underpinned by the *Business Continuity Emergency Management Plan* and close collaboration with staff of the Directorate of Estates and Facilities, particularly University Security.

#### 3 CONSERVATION AND COLLECTIONS CARE

##### 3.1 Preventive Conservation

Preventive conservation covers every measure taken to minimise deterioration and prevent damage by creating conditions optimal for the preservation of the collections as far as is compatible with their use. Preventive conservation acts on the context or the surroundings of a single or a group of items, so is indirect and does not interfere with the structure or materials from which an object is made. University Collections therefore focuses on maintaining secure and environmentally-controlled storage facilities for the collections in a pollution and pest managed and monitored environment. Conservation staff also carry out conservation assessments of the collections as part of the acquisition process, loans and exhibitions, assess objects on inward loan and monitor the condition of all items within the collection and their environment. Preventive conservation is a matter for all staff and involves other university sections, particularly the Directorate of Estates and Facilities.

##### 3.2 Remedial Conservation

Remedial conservation encompasses the investigation of the deterioration and damage to an object together with the decision for and execution of an appropriate conservation treatment. The highest standards of conservation are ensured by the employment of professional, qualified staff and approved materials. Conservation treatments are only carried out by, or under the direct supervision of, a conservator. Minor conservation treatments may only be carried out by other staff/volunteers, if they have been trained for this purpose by a conservator. The Conservators prioritise conservation requirements within the framework of resources available. All conservation measures are documented for future reference. If treatments could prejudice the future value of an object, relevant stakeholders are involved in the treatment process.

##### 3.3 Standards

University Collections aims to meet the highest standards for preservation and conservation as laid out in professional standards and codes of conduct that encompass the various elements of preservation management and conservation practice, notably:

- PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management'
- BS EN 16893:2018 'Conservation of Cultural Heritage'

- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and Care of Archive and Library Collections
- Collections Trust Benchmarks in Collections Care 2.0
- The Institute of Conservation's (Icon) Code of Conduct
- The Institute of Conservation (Icon) Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR) Professional Standards

### 3.4 *Staff training and development*

All members of University Collections staff and volunteers will be trained in handling, Integrated Pest Management and emergency response procedures, with induction and refresher sessions arranged as required. Conservation staff are responsible for all aspects of preventive and remedial conservation, so will undertake training and professional development to maintain a high level of up-to-date technical knowledge. The University supports Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR), the professional practice assessment for conservation professionals, and the achievement and maintenance of accredited status. Members of staff are encouraged to attend relevant external training events relating to preservation and conservation practice.

### 3.5 *Conservation Strategy*

Available resources mean that the conservation strategy is primarily reactive. The conservation work programme consists of six strands:

- 1 Exhibitions and Loans
- 2 Preservation projects: day to day checking, cleaning, re-housing of accessions, and larger scale collection focused preservation work
- 3 Support for digitisation projects
- 4 Emergency conservation and preservation work
- 5 Small conservation projects: conservation of items that have been prioritised for stabilisation and can be completed in less than 5 hours
- 6 Large conservation projects: conservation of individual items or collections that will take anything above 5 hours to complete. These are prioritised for conservation treatment through a regular process of review and may require external funding.

### 3.6 *Environmental management and monitoring*

To enable improved access to the collections, consistent with the care of the collections, University Collections aims to maintain appropriate and secure accommodation for all collections wherever they are stored, displayed, handled and used. The building envelope provides the main protection for the collections by buffering them from the outdoor environment. As far as practicable, the most favourable conditions of temperature, relative humidity and light levels will be provided for the collection, as well as creating a pollution and pest-controlled environment that achieves a satisfactory compromise between the long-term preservation of the collection and maximum accessibility. This includes meeting expectations required by insurers, with a specific 'Special Collections' insurance policy. The temperature and relative humidity in storage areas, the Collections Research Room and Gallery is monitored using data loggers, while CCTV is installed at key points and areas protected by a VESDA smoke detection system, intruder alarm system, and with regular inspections and fault reporting in close collaboration with the Directorate of Estates and Facilities. The light levels of places where items are on display will also be checked regularly.

### 3.7 *Storage materials*

Items will be preserved in a manner appropriate to their material requirements, using approved conservation grade materials wherever possible in accordance with current preservation and conservation standards. A programme of re-housing and re-packaging is replacing non-archival grade housing, while items that have undergone interventive conservation treatment will normally be housed in archival-grade enclosures.

### 3.8 *Housekeeping*

A housekeeping plan including a pest management programme, environmental data-logging, and a regular cleaning regime ensures that the highest standards are maintained. Spot checks are carried out for mould, insect activity, cellulose nitrate degradation and other threats to the collections. Led by conservation staff providing advice on current best practice, all University

Collections staff will contribute to housekeeping documented in operating procedures for all relevant venues.

### 3.9 *Use of collections*

A primary purpose of preservation and conservation is the facilitation of safe access to collections. Preservation considerations will also assist in determining the selection of material and the frequency and duration of their use for exhibition and other purposes. Material may be withdrawn from use if deemed as at serious risk, in which case it will be reported to the Management Team of University Collections for review and possible prioritising for treatment. If it will remain inaccessible for some time, digitisation or the generation of surrogate copies will be considered to ensure continued access.

### 3.10 *Moving, transport and loans*

Objects in the collections are regularly moved for use in university teaching, exhibitions, loans and outreach activities. To ensure the well-being of the collections, University Collections staff will promote best practice in handling, packing and transport of objects through the use of written guidelines, appropriate documentation systems, materials and ongoing staff development and training. The prerequisite for any loan from the collections is that items are provided with the equivalent level of care as they would receive within the University. Material will be prepared for exhibition and displayed in accordance with accepted national and international standards. Condition of Loan agreements and facility reports will be exchanged with borrowing/loan institutions.

### 3.11 *Health and Safety*

Some conservation and collections care activities have the potential to bring with them Health & Safety risks. These can include the current use of chemicals both in a preventive and interventive setting and the past use of hazardous chemicals to treat and preserve objects, such as arsenic and mercury. In addition, some objects within the collection have inherent risks such as those that are radioactive or poisonous. Equipment used in conservation activities, such as sharps, may pose a risk of injury. Risks are mitigated by legislation and regulation, such as the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002, use of Safety Data Sheets, and University policies and procedures. Specific risk assessments are carried out for activities and locations that are identified as having particular hazards. Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be supplied to all staff and visitors as required by risk assessments.

### 3.12 *Documentation*

A full record of preservation projects, surveys, creation of surrogates, and conservation treatments will be kept in the collection documentation system and associated records.

## 5 **SECURITY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

An integrated approach across the University and the Directorate of Digital and Information Services ensures day-to-day protection, business continuity, and appropriate procedures in the event of emergencies to minimise damage to the collections and threats to staff and visitors. They are outlined in the *Business Continuity Emergency Management Plan*. Measures include maintaining and updating risk assessments and reaction plans for each building in which collections are housed, as well as the provision of effective response procedures and emergency supplies. The effectiveness of procedures will be ensured by ongoing staff development and training and ensuring that information is readily available while taking account of the necessity for confidentiality.

A full security review will be conducted at least every five years, in conjunction with University security staff and drawing on the expertise of other staff and external advice as appropriate. Security is the responsibility of all staff, working with the University Security service. Protocols have been developed with the Security service to ensure an appropriate and timely response to all threats.

University Collections has stores of emergency response supplies across the venues for which it is responsible, including a large-scale store and local supplies boxes. An emergency

response plan is in place and disaster response exercises are carried out to ensure the currency of the plan and staff familiarity with response supplies and procedures, supported by an ongoing contract with Harwell Drying and Restoration who specialise in disaster recovery. The aim of the plan is to provide procedures and guidelines to be followed in the event of emergencies such as fire, flood, power failure, pest infestation, growth of mould, vandalism and accident. The preservation and security of digital data will follow relevant University policies and processes.

## **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 guidance and plans 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, 25 November 2025.