

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

Collections Care and Conservation Policy

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Name of governing body:	The University of Manchester
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Policy review procedure:	Reviewed by Whitworth Executive Team and Director, approved by University of Manchester Cultural Institutes Governance Committee (CIGC)
Date at which this policy is due for review:	March 2030
Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Collections Care and Conservation Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.	

Introduction

The Whitworth's collection care and conservation policy will:

- Take measures to slow deterioration and prevent damage to its collections that comprise historic, modern and contemporary works of art on paper, paintings, textiles and wallpapers.
- Manage, monitor and improve the state of its collections, environment and buildings
- Enhance long-term engagement with the collections through effective and pragmatic solutions to the storage, display, use and access systems.
- Resource and implement programmes of conservation work in line with the policy
- Provide and maintain documentation systems designed for conservation and collection care
- Undertake research and publish on conservation and collection care practice
- Raise awareness of conservation and provide advice and support to individuals and other institutions, local and national

the Whitworth

- Achieve or exceed current standards of conservation and professional practice measured against appropriate benchmarks

This policy deals with collections in store, on exhibition and display, or on loan to/from the Gallery, and the systems designed to care for them. The Gallery aims to ensure exemplary standards of collections care and will endeavour to be a leader in significant aspects of collection care. The Gallery will benchmark its conservation standards and practice against key international comparators.

Delivery of Conservation and Collection Care

1. The Collections Care and Access Team

The Whitworth's Collections Care & Access Team (CCAT) comprises three conservators - paper, textiles and preventive/sculpture; two exhibition & collection care technicians; and one conservation and collections care technician/conservation apprentice. External expertise is used to complement and supplement skills as required – for example for media that fall outside internal conservation expertise (furniture, stained glass and paintings), or specialist technicians to lift and manoeuvre large sculptural works. ICON (PACR) accredited conservators are used wherever possible in these circumstances.

The textiles conservator additionally acts as Collections Care Manager for the team and sits on the Gallery's Management Team. The team falls under the responsibility of the Head of Collections & Exhibitions.

In conserving or caring for objects and collections, the team exercise the judgment gained through education, training and experience in deciding what is reasonable and acceptable, and will comply with standards of good practice widely accepted in the museums sector in the UK, for instance the codes of ethics published by the Museums Association and the Institute of Conservation (ICON) and the standards expected by MLA implemented through the national accreditation scheme for museums.

All the Whitworth's conservators have received specialist training, are accredited or are working towards PACR accreditation through ICON, and all members of the team are encouraged and supported in networking, peer consultation and benchmarking, and in pursuing continuous professional development. Individual and team training needs are reviewed annually through annual PDR's. The Conservation and Collection Care Technician has qualified with the V&A Conservation & Collection Care Technician Diploma and is now completing a conservation apprenticeship under the aegis of the University of Lincoln. The team is supported by a part-time AV technician.

2. Preventive Conservation

Collections are safeguarded in the Gallery through the specification and management of the following systems:

- **Building maintenance**

As part of the University of Manchester, the long-term maintenance of the Gallery is the responsibility of the University Estates Department. The Gallery's Buildings and Operations Manager (with input from the CCAT Team) is responsible for the day-to-day management and maintenance of the building, and together with the Building and Operations Team oversees a programme of routine building inspection, assessment, monitoring and maintenance.

- **Physical security**

Security procedures are in place, including intruder detection linked to University Security and the police; trained and dedicated staff control access points to the building, swipe card systems, keys and locking-up procedures. Access to collection stores and objects on display is restricted to relevant personnel. The National Security Advisor reviews Gallery security as necessary.

- **Mechanical and electrical maintenance**

Mechanical and electrical systems are maintained by the University Estates Department and through service contracts. As with buildings maintenance the Gallery's Building & Operations team monitor all systems and liaise closely with University Estates.

- **Storage and display furniture, packaging and supports**

The CCAT team works together with curatorial colleagues in the design and construction of storage and display furniture and fittings as appropriate for the materials being housed. Materials are inert and tested as necessary prior to use. Conservation grade materials are used for supports, packaging and the long-term storage of objects. The CCAT team works with curatorial colleagues to ensure sustainable access to all works from the Gallery's collections. The CCAT team contributes to innovative systems to implement 'storage for access' to enable works from the collection to be enjoyed by and responded to by the widest potential audience.

See Appendix – **Forward Plan 2024-27**

- **Environmental systems**

Heating and air-handling systems to control temperature and relative humidity are in place in Gallery stores and galleries. Following its building development programme (completed 2015), and in line with broadening environmental parameters, the Gallery is taking a sustainable passive approach to environmental control and is implementing an environmental conditions awareness programme. Maintenance and calibration of environmental control equipment is managed by the Preventive Conservator with annual service contracts.

The Gallery's BMS controls and monitors the building's mechanical and electrical equipment including heating, ventilation, lighting, fire, and security systems. Use of the BMS falls within the remit of the Building & Operations team in liaison with University Estates. The environmental performance of the Gallery is regularly assessed to improve energy efficiency, and to reduce costs and carbon emissions where possible.

Several different lighting systems are in place suitable for the display of Gallery collections, including DALI control in the refurbished exhibition galleries. In other areas the Gallery has installed more energy efficient systems including LED lighting. Conditions are augmented using louvres, and blinds as necessary, and most glazing includes UV filters. The CCAT team is responsible for setting and monitoring lighting to safeguard the Gallery collections and items on inward loan according to object need.

- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**

All Gallery staff are responsible for IPM which includes adhering to the Gallery's Food Code and the maintenance of designated food preparation and consumption areas. The Preventive/Sculpture Conservator is responsible for implementing the IPM programme throughout the Gallery, chairing the IPM Group, staff IPM induction and organising an annual training programme for all new permanent and casual staff.

See Appendix - **Gallery Food Code**

- **Housekeeping**

The CCAT team take responsibility for cleaning and housekeeping in stores, whilst a daily cleaning schedule of the Gallery building, both front and back-of-house, is undertaken through an external cleaning contract in liaison with the CCAT team as required. Additional cleaning is put in place for all public and commercial activities, especially those involving catering and events. Cleaning of all cases & plinths is undertaken by the CCAT team.

- **Monitoring collections in galleries and stores**

The CCAT team, and in particular the Preventive/Sculpture Conservator is responsible for monitoring and maintaining suitable environmental conditions for works in storage and on display. The Gallery monitors temperature, RH and light via telemetric data loggers stored on a dedicated computer and this is reviewed on a regular basis. All data loggers and associated equipment are serviced and calibrated annually.

- **Emergency response plan**

The Gallery has a reviewed and rewritten Emergency Response Plan to include disaster preparedness, emergency response and collections salvage. In the event of an emergency, relevant staff are contacted via the University Security and Estates teams and the Buildings and Operations Manager. The gallery has a WhatsApp Group for rapid communication amongst relevant staff. Disaster recovery equipment and materials are located in several key parts of the Gallery building; this is managed by the Preventive/Sculpture Conservator.

See Appendix - **Emergency Incident Plan**

- **Collection Management software**

Conservation and collection care documentation is recorded on the Gallery's Collection Management System, EMu. This includes conservation treatment records, collections surveys and object assessments, condition reports for loans, environmental records, and movement control.

See Appendices for example of outgoing condition report form generated from EMu

- **Collections surveying**

The CCAT team work together to prioritise conservation treatments through a rolling programme of collection familiarisation, surveying and assessments. Particularly sensitive or vulnerable parts of the collection are identified and reviewed on a regular basis. KE Emu is used to record all relevant assessments.

The collection of oil and acrylic paintings was surveyed on Emu during 2018 and a survey of the Time-Based Media Collection is ongoing as of January 2025.

3. Remedial Conservation

- **Conservation treatments**

The conservation of Gallery objects is carried out by the gallery conservators, or by external accredited conservators where possible. The Gallery will safeguard as far as possible the material integrity and significance of each work, and will intervene with interventive treatment to:

1. Enable the long-term stability of an object via minimal intervention procedures
2. Aid interpretation of an object after consultation with relevant curatorial staff
3. Enable study and research

- **Documentation and recommendations for future action**

All treatments and courses of action are recorded via the EMu collections management database and include photographic records as appropriate. Record keeping may include storage, display, handling and environmental recommendations. Any work undertaken by external contractors is similarly uploaded onto the EMu collections management database.

See Appendix – **Forward Plan 2024-27 for specific planned projects**

4. Additional Team Roles & Responsibilities

- The CCAT team contribute to teaching students at the University of Manchester in the area of conservation and collection care, and similarly may provide these services to students from other HEI's. The team will also offer training regionally to other museum sector colleagues and will undertake educational activities for the general public as part of the Gallery's learning and engagement offer. The team provides in-house training to Gallery colleagues and volunteers as appropriate.
- The conservators provide advice to the general public on conservation and collection care and provide advice and support to professional colleagues and institutions as appropriate. On occasion, a request for extensive support from an external source may be taken on by member of the team on a freelance basis subject to the policies of the University and with the agreement of the Gallery Director.