

# The Whitworth Documentation Policy

October 2015

## 1. CONTEXT

- 1.1. Documentation is a core activity of the Whitworth.
- 1.2. The role of documentation in the Whitworth is to ensure efficient recording of, and access to, collections information, meeting national standards of good collections stewardship, security, accountability, study, research, use and access.
- 1.3. Documentation is the responsibility of each member of the Curatorial Team, with loans in and out being administered by the Gallery Registrar. Documentation activities, including the development and supervision of procedural, data and terminology standards, are co-ordinated by the Head of Collections and the Gallery Registrar working together with the Curatorial Team.
- 1.4. Documentation records are held in a number of formats, both paper and digital. The majority of paper records are held within the collection object filing system of the Curatorial Team, held centrally under lock and key in the Study Centre.
- 1.5. The central computerised collections database, related electronic processing and network infrastructure are developed and maintained by the University of Manchester's ICT section, in collaboration with Whitworth staff, with support from the supplier of the software, KE Emu.
- 1.6. The Documentation Policy supports the Whitworth's mission and strategic priorities.
- 1.7. The purpose of the Documentation Policy is to provide the framework within which the Whitworth formulates and implements a Documentation Plan, guiding the gallery in how it documents its collections.
- 1.8. It is recognised that priority should be given to the appropriate and effective allocation of resources for documentation within the Curatorial Team to enable the delivery of the Documentation Plan.

## 2. KEY PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. **Effective collections management.** The Whitworth will record information and create access to that information to support efficient management of the Whitworth's collections as part of a collections management framework.
- 2.2. **Accountability.** The Whitworth will record sufficient information about the items in its care to establish the identity, location and legal ownership of the items.
- 2.3. **Adherence to standards and guidelines.** The Whitworth places a high level of importance on procedural standards and documentation objectives necessary to meet the Accreditation Standard for museums and galleries. The Whitworth applies SPECTRUM, the UK Museum

Documentation Standard, to all areas of documentation. As a baseline, the gallery will meet, but aim to exceed, the minimum standards for the SPECTRUM primary procedures. Internal standards and procedures and their relationship to SPECTRUM are detailed in the Whitworth's Documentation procedures manual.

**2.4. Adherence to legislation and ethical codes.** The Whitworth's's documentation activities will take account of current legislation, including all applicable legislation relating to copyright and IPR, data protection and freedom of information. All documentation will be carried out in accordance with the Museum Association Code of Ethics.

**2.5. Security of information.** All paper-based and digital records created by the Whitworth will be processed and stored in such a way that they are protected from security risks. Any personal information will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Backups will be made of digital records on an ongoing basis and regular copies made of accession registers.

**2.6. Preservation.** Both paper and digital records will be stored in such a way as to avoid loss and ensure long-term preservation. Digital data will be exported regularly in common standard formats to mitigate against potential technical inaccessibility in the future.

**2.7. Systems sustainability.** Digital systems to support documentation will be developed in such a way as to promote sustainability and ensure that they can be maintained into the future. Use of open source and *de facto* standard technologies will be encouraged where appropriate, and proprietary solutions avoided if possible

**2.8. Keeping records up to date.** The Whitworth will keep collections information up to date, implementing a long term policy to eliminate any retrospective accessioning backlog and accessioning new acquisitions as soon as possible. The Whitworth will aim to create a basic inventory record (with sufficient key information for identification) for all objects and catalogue records (with more detailed information) when appropriate and possible.

**2.9. Access to information.** Within a framework of standards and best practice guidelines, particularly requirements to protect sensitive personal and financial information, the Whitworth's documentation systems will be developed to maintain and extend access to collections information. This will involve access for both internal and external users, including general public, staff and students of the University of Manchester and visiting researchers

**2.10. User focus.** Collections documentation will be responsive to the information needs of users. Whilst adhering to agreed standards, some aspects of information recording and procedure may evolve in response to changing user requirements.

**2.11. Integration and standardisation within the service.** Documentation systems and procedures within the Whitworth will be brought together, as far as practical, to rationalise the management of collections information and maximise the benefits of closer systems integration.

**2.12. Open Data.** The Whitworth encourages wide access to and use of collections data produced by the gallery. Where possible and appropriate, open data licences will be used to assist re-use and interoperability. Data from the public access catalogue will be made available to aggregation services such as Europeana and third party developers.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION**

3.1. The Documentation Policy will be submitted to the Board of Governors for approval.

**3.2.** The Documentation Policy will be used to guide a Documentation Plan, prepared by the Head of Collections and the Gallery Registrar in consultation with all members of the Curatorial and Collection Care and Access Teams involved in collections documentation.

**3.3.** The Documentation Policy, Plan and any related documents will be posted online for internal access by all staff. The policy document will be posted also on the Whitworth's website for public access.

3.4. Regular audits of documentation information and procedures will be carried out. The Policy will be reviewed every five years.

**3.5.** Board of Governors endorsement in February 2015.