

## The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

### Documentation Policy

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Name of museum:	The Whitworth
Name of governing body:	The University of Manchester
Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:	March 2025
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 development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.	

#### 1. Introduction

The Whitworth's vision states that we 'actively seek and manifest connections between our collection of art, textiles and wallpaper and its role in society.' The documentation of our collection is a core activity of the Whitworth's vision and strategic priorities. 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.

Good documentation encourages co-operation between museums, ensures information does not remain in any one individual's head, and allows professional standards to be met.

The Museum's collections include both physical and digital collection items. Information about these collections and associated intellectual property is key to enable their use. Collection information is stored mainly on our collections database or as hard-copy in files.

# the Whitworth

## 2. Objectives

This policy sets out how the Whitworth will maintain museum standards in documentation and collections information and attain the very highest standard. It demonstrates how we will strengthen the security and robustness of our collections by maintaining accurate collections information and how we will improve accountability for collections and collections information.

## 3. Definition

Collections information is all the information that we collect, create, hold and maintain about our collection and/or collected items. This information can include a broad range of knowledge such as object identification, physical description, historical detail, and ownership history.

## 4. Key Principles

### 4.1 Audit and Accountability

- The Whitworth will record sufficient information about the items in its care to establish the identity, location and legal ownership of the items and that due diligence paperwork is created and maintained.
- We will be fully accountable for all objects that enter, or are already within, the Museum, both accessioned and unaccessioned.
- Entry, location, movement and exit documentation will be maintained for all items that enter, move within or exit the Whitworth for whatever purpose, regardless of their ownership status.
- We will ensure that all data is traceable through an audit trail as to who created or edited it.

### 4.2 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. Information will be recorded for each object, or group of objects, sufficient to allow unequivocal physical identification of that group of objects and provide full accountability and improved accessibility to the collections.
- The Whitworth applies Spectrum, the UK Museum Documentation Standard, to all areas of documentation. As a baseline, the gallery will meet and 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 Procedural Manual.

### 4.3 Adherence to legislation and ethical codes

- The Whitworth's documentation activities will take account of current legislation, including all current and 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.

## 4.4 Security and preservation of information

- All paper-based and digital records created by the Whitworth will be processed and stored to avoid loss, ensuring long-term preservation and be protected from security risks. Any personal information will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, alongside the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).
- Backups will be made of digital records on an ongoing basis and regular copies made of accession registers to mitigate against future potential technical inaccessibility.
- We will undertake regular reviews of the collection management databases to ensure they are fit for purpose and that collection information is appropriately safeguarded against potential future obsolescence of the systems.

## 4.5 Keeping records up to date

- The Whitworth will keep collections information up to date, following the Documentation Procedural Manual and implementing the Documentation Plan 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. Items will be documented so that we know the permanent or temporary locations of all items held by the Whitworth.

## 4.6 Physical verification

- Physical verification is the process whereby the Museum establishes, at a given point in time, the physical presence and location of a particular object/specimen in its care. Details of gaps in documentation are identified in the Whitworth's Documentation Plan, which includes an action plan to address the backlog.
- The Whitworth undertakes ongoing physical verification of its collection through an audit recorded in KE EMu. Physical verification of the collection may take place during object movement for research, loan, exhibition, conservation, photography, storage relocation or through a rolling collections management audit.

## 4.7 Access to information

- The Whitworth encourages wide access to, and use of collections data produced by the gallery, including access using the public online collection search. 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.

## 4.8 User focus

- Collections documentation will be responsive to the information needs and input of users. Whilst adhering to agreed standards, some aspects of information recording and procedure may evolve in response to changing user requirements.
- We will preserve all primary collection-related data, even when this is superseded by new information.

## 5. Implementation

This policy is one part of our Collections Management Framework, accordingly it operates alongside other related policies: Collection Development Policy; Collections Care and Conservation Policy; and Access Policy. These are saved publicly on the Whitworth website and internally on the Whitworth Hub. To effectively implement this policy staff should also refer to the Documentation Procedural Manual and Documentation Plan, also saved internally on the Whitworth Hub.

It is recognised that good documentation also encourages input and cooperation from a range of parties including Whitworth staff from across the organisation, external artists, researchers, academics, historians, museum and gallery professionals, manufacturers and a range of constituents who hold knowledge relating to our collections.