



Glossary: Benchmarks 2.0

This fact sheet contains descriptions of terms used in Benchmarks.

Advice

In several places in Benchmarks you will be asked to confirm that your organisation has “sought advice” about a particular aspect of collections care. There are many sources of advice about collections care, including, accredited conservators (see The Conservation Register on the Institute of Conservation’s website), Museum Mentors under the Museum Accreditation Scheme, colleagues, Subject Specialist Networks, and Collections Link networks. There is also *Benchmarks Advice*, published on Collections Link, which contains *Sources of Help and Advice* for current collections management standards, organisations and publications.

Airborne Pollution – Gaseous and Particulate

The introduction of gaseous chemicals, or particulate matter such as dust into the atmosphere surrounding a collection, either from an external source or from collections items

Benchmark

An agreed level of performance by which something can be measured, as in for example, “his writing is a benchmark for quality”. In Benchmarks in Collection Care individual *benchmarks* are used to define and measure different areas of collection care activity.

Building Management Plan

The purpose of a Building Management Plan, in the context of Benchmarks, is to identify which buildings house collections, and to provide schedules and identify responsibilities for care and maintenance.

Collection

A body of items held by an organisation together with associated information about the items and their use. Items can be physical, digital, 2D or 3D.

Collection care

A range of activities intended to safeguard a collection. These activities include policy making, planning and procedures relating to areas such as, for example, security, housekeeping, and environmental monitoring.

Collection care assessment

A written evaluation of the quality of collection care provided by an organisation for its collection.

Collections management

Managing collection care activities so that they are appropriate and effective in meeting the aims of the organisation that holds the collection.

Collections Management Policy

Clear policy statements are an important step towards good collections management. Policies set out the intention and direction of an organisation. Benchmarks follows *PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* in its definition of a Collections Management Policy. A Collections Management Policy is drawn from

the organisation's mission statement, and using the PAS 197 definition, is an overarching term to describe an organisation's policies in the following areas:

- Collections Development
- Collections Information
- Collections Access
- Collections Care and Conservation

When devising a policy it is important to remember proportionality - a policy statement does not need to be long, it may consist of only one paragraph, but it needs to fit the needs and size of your organisation. Policies are underpinned by *objectives* (aims), *programmes/plans* (activity which achieve an organisation's aims), and *processes* (how you carry out your plans in day to day activity).

Collections Development

Your Collections Management Policy should include a policy or statement about the development of your collection. In museums this policy is also known as an Acquisition and Disposal Policy. Benchmarks follows *PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* in its definition of a Collections Development Policy. A good policy would include:

- a definition of the scope of the existing collection
- the legal requirements that the organisation aims to comply with in the development of its collection
- a commitment to manage the collection within a specific ethical code
- a statement concerning the assessment of significance of items to be acquired
- a description of how the organisation accepts responsibility for items
- a description of the processes by which an organisation asserts responsibility for an item (eg. in Archives the processes of Pre-accession and Accession; in Libraries the processes of Selection and Acquisition; in museums the processes of Entry, Acquisition and Accession)
- a description of how the organisation removes items

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Collections Information Policy

Benchmarks follows *PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* in its definition of a Collections Information Policy. A good policy would include:

- a description of how the organisation obtains, documents, maintains and makes available information about the collection and the items in it
- the legal requirements that the organisation aims to comply with in the recording of collections information
- a commitment to manage the collection within a specific ethical code
- a commitment to provide and maintain an information retrieval system
- a commitment to identify and protect vital records

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Collections Access Policy

Benchmarks follows *PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* in its definition of a Collections Access Policy. A good policy would include:

- a description of how the organisation aims to provide access to its collection and information about the collection (ie through physical, sensory, intellectual access, lending, borrowing, displaying, utilising surrogates, handling, operating)
- the legal requirements that the organisation aims to comply with in providing access to its collection
- a commitment to manage the collection within a specific ethical code

- the type and extent of commercial access
- an assertion that the competing demands of access and long term care will be managed in accordance with the outcome of a collection care risk assessment

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Collections Care and Conservation Policy

Benchmarks follows *PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* in its definition of a Collections Care and Conservation Policy. A good policy would include:

- a commitment to a risk management approach to collections care
- the legal requirements that the organisation aims to comply with in the care and conservation of its collection
- a commitment to manage the collection within a specific ethical code
- a description of how collections care and conservation issues are communicated to employees, users and interested parties

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Condition Assessments

An analysis of the condition of a collection or part of a collection. The assessment can be achieved by assessing the condition of individual items, or for a large collection, by assessing a sample. The results are used to decide how to direct resources and prioritise conservation programmes and treatments.

Conservation

In Benchmarks *conservation* refers to hands on interactive techniques which are applied to museum, library and archive items in order to stabilise their physical condition, and extend their life.

Conservator

A person with specialist training and experience in the conservation and preservation of items in collections.

Courier

A member of staff or professionally trained person responsible for the transport of collections items between organisations.

CPD

Continuous Professional Development. *CPD* is a career long process through which individuals undertake learning, through a broad range of activities. The aim of *CPD* is to maintain, develop, and enhance professional skills and knowledge to improve performance in practice.

Edge platen

A photocopier with an *edge platen* has a sloping edge leading away from the edge of the platen area of the glass. This allows maximum presentation of the page area to the platen and avoids stress on the sewing and binding structure.

Emergency Preparedness

Policies, plans and activities which prepare and equip staff to handle an emergency which threatens the collection, including for example, training staff in evacuation procedures, compiling and maintaining up-to-date contact information, and stockpiling supplies such as mops, buckets, and polyethylene bags.

Emergency Plan

A written plan which identifies an organisation's vulnerabilities to emergency situations, indicates how to prevent or mitigate against the potential effects of an emergency and describes staff response.

Environmental Control

Actions taken to control the physical environment surrounding items in a collection, so that damage to them is limited. Measures to control environment can range from simple (such as closing doors and moving lights) to sophisticated (such as automatic lighting systems)

Environmental Monitoring

A collections care activity which measures and records the quality of factors in the physical environment, such as light or humidity, which may harm items in a collection.

Government Indemnity Scheme

A scheme under which the government is responsible for the payment of compensation, in the event of loss or damage to items which are on loan to a collections holding organisation in the UK. Borrowing organisations do not have to pay any premiums under the scheme, but they are required to accept a minimum liability. All museums, galleries and libraries which are publicly funded are eligible to apply for the scheme - including local authority and university museums - as is the National Trust. Other bodies, such as independent museums, may be eligible. See *Sources of Help and Advice in Benchmarks Advice*.

Item

In Benchmarks the term item is used to describe the individual objects (physical, digital, 2D and 3D) in a collection.

Integrated Pest Management

The aim of insect pest management is to provide practical, safe and cost-effective methods to prevent collections and buildings from being damaged by pests. *Integrated Pest Management* is a term used to refer to an approach to pest management where an organisation looks at the whole picture, rather than just reacting to each pest crisis. There are five steps in an integrated pest management programme:

- Identifying pests - recognising species, the signs of their presence, understanding their life cycle
- Assessing the problem - through inspection, trapping, identifying high risk parts of collection or building
- Avoiding and preventing pests - denying habitat, developing procedures eg. quarantine areas
- Solving pest problems - changing environment, carrying out appropriate treatments
- Reviewing pest management procedures - periodic assessment of your pest management programme to make improvements

Metadata

A set of data which conveys information about other data and can be used for records management, retrieval and use of records. Information in a catalogue can be considered to be metadata.

Microform

A continuous roll of film containing photographs of documents at a greatly reduced size

Mission Statement

A short written statement of the purpose of an organisation. The mission statement guides the actions of an organisation, provides a sense of direction, and guides decision-making. In the context of Benchmarks it is expected that a mission statement will make reference to the collections and their long term care and preservation.

Organisation

In Benchmarks, the term *organisation* is used to refer to a museum, library or archive which holds and manages physical and digital collections to meet a defined purpose.

Pests

In Benchmarks, the term *pests* is used to denote:

- * Insects, such as furniture beetle, webbing clothes moth, common booklouse and silverfish
- * Vertebrates, such as rats, mice, squirrels, sparrows, pigeons, starlings, rabbits and feral cats

Planning Cycle

The process of developing, implementing, reviewing and improving the plans of an organisation in the context of its purpose and policies.

Platen

The glass surface of a flatbed scanner

Preservation

In Benchmarks, the term *preservation* describes the overall management of a collection in order to reduce deterioration, prevent damage and extend its life. Preservation includes establishing and implementing policies and procedures to manage all aspects of collection care including for example environment, physical protection, conservation treatment and emergency planning.

Procedures

A *procedure* is an agreed way, usually written down, by which your organisation carries out its processes. So, for example you may have written guidelines which describe your procedure for moving items in your collection.

Processes

Benchmarks follows *PAS 197: 2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management* in its definition of *processes*. Processes are the daily activities undertaken by staff when managing the collection. These activities include, for example, conservation work, cataloguing, packing or moving an item.

Reading and Research Rooms

In Benchmarks, this term is used to describe areas where collections are handled and consulted by users. These areas can be reading rooms, search rooms, stores, study or education rooms, or special areas in display areas.

Recovery Plan

Actions taken following an emergency in order to return operations to normal. Depending on the type and extent of the emergency, this can be a long-term process. For example, following a disaster, staff and volunteers may spend months sorting through the gift store inventory and discarding damaged items, or sorting through the collection and carrying out basic washing or surface-cleaning tasks.

Relative Humidity (RH)

Relative Humidity is a measure of the percentage of water vapour (humidity) in the air. We can feel the dampness or dryness of the air but we need instruments to actually measure RH. Temperature affects RH - when warm air is cooled, the RH climbs, when cold air is heated, the RH falls. Collections differ in response to RH levels, depending on the materials they are made from - in particular fluctuating levels of RH can damage collections. Collections organisations measure, manage and control RH to lessen its impact on collections.

Risk Assessment

The process of identifying all the risks to and from an activity and assessing the potential impact of each risk.

Smarter Loans

Smarter Loans is a collaborative project, co-ordinated by the Museums Association, to review the key principles of lending and borrowing items in UK museums, with the aim of setting out new, more simplified guidance. *Smarter Loans* is part of the Museum Association's *Effective Collections* programme. See the *Sources of Help and Advice* in *Benchmarks Advice*.

Staff

In Benchmarks, *staff* is used to describe everyone who works in a collections organisation, including volunteers.

Standards

Criteria to be used as rules, or guidelines, for ensuring that material, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose.

Storage

The physical housing of collections in non-public stores.

Surrogate

A copy of an original, possibly in a different form to the original, in order to protect the original from use or overuse.

UKRG Standard Facilities Report

The UK Registrar's Group publishes a *Standard Facilities Report* on their website, which is a form, used by museums, which helps borrowers and lenders identify potential problems in making and receiving loans, and reach agreement on how problems can be resolved. See the *Sources of Help and Advice* in *Benchmarks Advice*.

Users

People who use museum, library and archive collections.



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