COLLECTIONS TRUST ACCREDITATION GUIDANCE SHEET 2:
Collections Management Policies

This guidance sheet explains what is meant by a Collections Management Policy and provides a guide to the integrated Collections Management Policy set out in the PAS197:2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management and it also illustrates how the code of practice relates to the UK Accreditation Standard 2011 (requirements for policy only). You may find it helpful to read Fact Sheet 1 – Collections Management Framework first.

1.3 What is a Collections Management Policy?

The PAS197 defines a policy as the:

‘overall intentions and direction of an organisation as formally expressed by top management, [or the governing body]’

The function of a policy is to set the tone, and provide long term guiding principles for the management of the collection. It can be helpful to think of a policy as a statement of the ‘What’ and the ‘Why’. It should not include information about the ‘How’ (procedures), or detail of the ‘When’, ‘Who’ and ‘Where’ (plans).

A policy should be written in broad enough terms to last for several years, whereas a plan will be reviewed and updated more frequently. Procedures or procedural manuals are developed as working documents at an operational level and are rarely signed off by the governing body. Although they may be referred to, they should not be included within a policy.

Policies in the PAS197

The PAS197 encourages the development of an integrated Collections Management framework (as described in Guidance Sheet 1 – Collections Management Framework). A key element of this framework approach is the idea of integrated policies.

The PAS197 advocates creating one short overarching Collections Management Policy statement that will set the context for all Collections Management work.

This introductory policy should refer to the mission statement, or statement of purpose, of the organisation, and the legislation, statutory requirements and ethical codes that are common to all areas of Collections Management work. It should include any broad policy statements that are common to all areas of Collections Management activity so these do not need to be repeated in each of the subject-specific policies that follow.

The diagram below shows the structure of policies set out in the PAS197:2009
The PAS197 identifies four main areas of Collections Management work:

- Collections Development (also known as Acquisition and Disposal)
- Collections Information (also known as Documentation)
- Collections Access
- Collections Care and Conservation

To achieve maximum public benefit, whilst also ensuring long term care of the collections, these four areas of policy need to be developed with close reference to each other, and in line with the overall mission of the organisation. Altogether, this constitutes an integrated Collections Management Policy.

The PAS197 is a code of practice is intended to be used as an improvement tool, rather than a prescriptive standard. This means you are not tied to these policy headings. The exact terminology and structures you use are not important so long as the subject areas are covered adequately and the policies complement rather than conflict with each other.

**PAS197 and UK Accreditation Scheme**

The UK Accreditation Standard 2011 encourages museums to develop polices, plans and procedures using a framework approach.

Recognising the importance of policies in guiding the work of museums, the Accreditation Standard now requires museums to have in place four policies which match the policy areas identified in the PAS197.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation Policy requirement</th>
<th>Accreditation Standard paragraph number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collections Development (Acquisition and Disposal)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections documentation policy</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections care and conservation policy</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access policy statement</td>
<td>3.1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many museums will find it useful to follow the PAS197 methodology when developing their policies; however, it will be quite possible to meet Accreditation compliance without it.

**COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICIES FOR ACCREDITATION**

**Collections Development Policy**

A Collections Development Policy is an important document that helps your museum to shape its collections. The policy is used to outline the strengths and weaknesses of your collection and to describe how you would like to develop the collection in the future through acquisition and rationalisation.

Due to the high number of important legal and ethical considerations involved in acquisition and disposal, the Accreditation Standard refers applicants to a template policy to ensure that museums include key elements in their policies. Accredited museums are encouraged to use the template, but may also develop their policies to include elements that are of importance to their individual museum.

Museums should note that there is one new requirement in the Accreditation 2011 standard that was not in Accreditation 2004. Museums are now required to include:

- ‘Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal as appropriate’
The PAS197 also encourages museums to consider including a commitment to the use of significance assessments and impact statements in their collections development policies. This is not a requirement of Accreditation. For more information on the role of significance assessment and impact statements in collections development see PAS197:2009, or Collections Management – a practical guide (Hillhouse, 2009)

**Accreditation 2011 – the requirement**

**2.2 Development Policy (acquisition and disposal)**

‘The Museum must have an approved policy for developing collections (also known as an acquisition and disposal policy). The policy must include:

- The statement of purpose
- An overview of current collections
- Themes and priorities for future collecting
- Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal
- Information about the legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items’

The template policy is available on Collections Link

**Collections Documentation Policy**

Collections documentation and the management of information about your collections underpins all the other collections work in the museum. It is important to have a clear policy statement defining your commitment to gathering storing and making available information about the collections.

Many museums have systems for collating and storing information about collections in place. However, in some cases, systems are not up to date, or the information about the collections is of a variable quality. A documentation policy statement can be used to make a commitment to improving the systems (both manual and electronic) and to set out the standards that you are aiming to achieve. A documentation policy statement can be short and concise and should reflect the size and nature of your museum.

At a minimum, the PAS197 recommends that the documentation (information) policy should contain:

- A description of how collections information is documented kept up to date and made available. Or, a statement of what the museum aims to achieve. e.g it is likely that you will make reference to SPECTRUM 4.0 – the UK Standard for Collections Management

- Reference to the legal requirements and ethical codes that govern collections documentation within the museum. (For a list of relevant legislation and ethical codes see SPECTRUM Advice sheet ‘Sources of Help and Advice: SPECTRUM 4.0’ on Collections Link)

- A commitment to provide and maintain a Collections Management system that enables input and retrieval of collections information.
NOTE: Some museums may have a wider information policy setting out their approach to the management of all information within the museum including management records and other data held by the museum. In this case, the documentation policy required for Accreditation may be integrated within the wider information policy. Renaissance London have done extensive work in this area, their Information Policy Toolkit is included in the list of references at the end of this guidance sheet.

**Accreditation 2011 – the requirement**

2.3 Documentation policy

The Museum must be guided by a documentation policy statement. This may be part of a wider collections information policy.

**Collections Care and Conservation Policy**

Collections care and conservation is a major part of Collections Management activity in a museum and it is important to have a clear policy statement setting out the museum’s approach.

The following definitions may help to distinguish the distinct areas of activity:

- **Collections care** – a range of activities intended to safeguard a collection. These activities can include organisational policies, security, storage, cleaning, maintenance, handling, scientific investigation, environmental monitoring and control, exhibitions and loans, conservation, provision of surrogates and emergency planning (PAS197).

- **Conservation includes:**
  - **Remedial conservation** – interventive techniques applied to an item to achieve chemical and physical stabilisation for the purpose of extending the useful life of the item to ensure its continued availability (PAS197)
  - **Preventive conservation** - choosing and managing museum buildings, site and environment to achieve optimum conditions, including environmental monitoring and control, pest management, storage and display provision. (MGS Advice Sheet – What is collection care?)

In times of limited resources, the PAS197 encourages museums to take a strategic approach to protecting and conserving the collections. For example, by using risk assessments, and prioritising collections care work in line with the overall strategic goals of the organisation, it is possible to target remedial conservation at areas of the collection that are most often requested for loan, display, or research. Your collection care and conservation policy can be used to outline these strategic priorities for remedial conservation.

At a minimum, the PAS197 recommends that the collections care and conservation policy statement should contain:

- A commitment to a risk management approach to collections care. This would entail carrying out regular risk assessments and using the outcomes to inform decisions about collections care and conservation.
➢ Reference to the legal requirements and ethical codes that govern collections care and conservation within the museum. For a list of relevant legislation and ethical codes see SPECTRUM Advice sheet ‘Sources of Help and Advice: SPECTRUM 4.0’ on Collections Link

➢ A description of how collections care and conservation issues are communicated. ie – state how you intend to keep staff, volunteers and stakeholders informed.

Additionally, and in line with the Accreditation recommendations for collections care and conservation planning, the policy statement can include commitments to:

➢ environmental monitoring
➢ environmental control – you may specify the range of environmental conditions you aim to maintain.
➢ building maintenance
➢ housekeeping
➢ a policy of consulting accredited professionals for advice and for remedial conservation treatment.

**Accreditation 2011 – the requirement**

2.4 Collections care and conservation policy

The museum must have an approved policy statement to guide its approach to collections care and conservation.

**Collections Access Policy**

Within the Accreditation 2011 Standard, the requirement for an Access policy statement is included in Section 3.0 *Users and their experiences*. Widening access and improving the user experience is high on most museum agendas.

Approaching the development of all four policies in an integrated way and ensuring that Access policy priorities are in tune with the wider work of Collections Management, will bring tangible benefits to both the museum users and the collections.

At a minimum, the *PAS197* recommends that the access policy statement should contain:

➢ A description of how the organisation aims to provide access to its collection and information about the collection in a way that is in line with organisation’s mission statement, including how the organisation:
  ○ Facilitates physical, sensory and intellectual access to items in the collection and collections information on site and, where applicable, virtually;
  ○ Lends and borrows items to/from individuals or other organisations
  ○ Displays items to the public
  ○ Utilises surrogates
  ○ Where applicable, manages collections and items that are handled and operated
  ○ Identifies users and their needs and barriers to access

➢ The legal requirements that govern the organisation and other requirements 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 that will be granted to items taking account of intellectual property constraints; and

An assertion that the competing demands of access and long term care will be managed in accordance with the outcome of the collection care risk assessment

Additionally, your access policy may contain specific statements about access to the collection by:

- school groups
- community groups
- researchers
- other specific groups relevant to your museum

Some museums will have separate Loan policies, or these may be included within the overall collections access statement. The policy needs to be proportionate and should reflect the size and priorities of your organisation.

**Accreditation 2011 – the requirement**

The museum must do the following:

3.1.5 take account of users’ needs, guided by a policy statement setting out a commitment to give everyone access to collections and associated information

**Using the PAS197 to develop an integrated Collections Management Policy**

**Integrated Policies**

Although not specifically required for Accreditation, most museums will find it beneficial to set the policies up in an integrated using a general Collections Management Policy statement as an introduction to a suite of interlinked policies, as described earlier in this guidance sheet.

Your museum may already develop policy in an integrated way. But, in many museums there is a tendency for policy to be developed by individuals, or by individual departments working in isolation. If this is the case in your museum, committing to developing integrated policies is likely to be very beneficial to your organisation. For best results you will need bring together staff, volunteers or trustees to discuss the policies and to the areas of overlap and in doing so you are likely to achieve a greater understanding of common goals and a clear sense of overall purpose. This joint working is a key element of the PAS197 cycle of improvement (as explained in Collections Trust Guidance Sheet 1 – Collections Management Framework)

Listed below are some examples of policy cross-over to help get you started, but you are likely to discover many more:

- **Collections Access – Collections Documentation**
  You may make a commitment to collate user generated information about your collections and to store it in a retrievable format in the Collections Management system.
Collections development – Collections Documentation
You may link your documentation and collections development policies by committing to reducing an accessioning backlog. And vice versa, acquisition may be restricted until accessioning is up-to-date.

Collections Development – Collections care and conservation
Collecting new material impacts on your storage, remedial, and preventive conservation programmes. Committing to carrying out an impact assessment before deciding to acquire new items may help to ensure that the these two policies work together to ensure the best care of the collection.

Collections Access Policy – Collections Development
You may adapt collections development priorities and collecting themes in response to usage, or public consultation.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Accreditation: The UK standard for museums and galleries, 2011, MLA (2011)

Accreditation: The UK standard for museums and galleries – Assessment Guidance, MLA (2011)


Collections Management – a practical guide, Hillhouse, S. (2009), Collections Trust
http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/shop/product/view/2/9

Sources of Help and Advice: SPECTRUM 4.0, Collections Trust (2011)

Collections Link - http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/

SPECTRUM 4.0 - http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes/spectrum


Who is this guidance sheet for?
This guidance sheet is written for museums working towards the standard set out in the UK Accreditation Scheme for Museums. Along with the linked guidance sheets listed below, it provides a basic guide to the Collections Management Policy requirements of the PAS197:2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management and Section 2.0 Collections of Accreditation 2011.

This guidance sheet is accompanied by two other related guidance sheets which are also available on Collections Link:
  Guidance Sheet 1 - Collections Management Framework
  Guidance Sheet 3 - Collections Management: Planning and Procedures.

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