

Royal College of Surgeons of England Museums Collections Care and Conservation Policy

Collections: The Museums of The Royal College of Surgeons of England, including the Hunterian Collection (RCSHC); the College Museum Collection (RCSHM); the Historical Instrument Collection (RCSIC); the Special Collections including portraits, busts and furniture (RCSSC); the Odontological Collection (RCSOM) the Anatomy Collection (RCSAC); the Pathology Collection (RCSPC); the Microscope Slide Collection (RCSMS) and associated reserve collections.

Date approved by Trustees of the Hunterian Collection: 9 October 2024

Date approved by Library, Museums and Archive Committee: 19 September 2024

Date approved by College Council: 5 December 2024

Date for review: September 2029

1. Scope and purpose of the policy

- 1.1. The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCS England) holds collections of outstanding medical, scientific, historical and cultural significance. Some Designated and Accredited by Arts Council England. The collections are held in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. Its aim is to care for and use these collections to:
 - 1.1.1. Enhance RCS England's reputation by raising awareness of surgeons and their work in society.
 - 1.1.2. Aid the professional work of RCS England by providing training resources.
 - 1.1.3. Facilitate and generate excellent medical, scientific, historical and other research.
 - 1.1.4. Support public engagement with, and understanding of, surgery, its history and practice and related arts and sciences.
- 1.2. The aim of this policy is to outline preventive and interventive collections care measures that will maximise access to the collections for present and future users.
- 1.3. This policy works within the RCS England's overall approach to risk management, as articulated in the Risk Register.
- 1.4. Under the terms and conditions with which Parliament entrusted the Hunterian Collection to the Company of Surgeons in 1799, "the Preparations shall be kept in a state of Preservation, and the Collection in as perfect a state as possible".
- 1.5. This policy does not cover material held in the RCS England Library and Archive Collections.
- 1.6. This policy complements and expands upon *RCS England Museums Collections Development Policy* and *RCS England Museums Collections Information Policy* and will be realised by the activities detailed in *RCS England Museums Forward Plan*, *Documentation Plan* and *Collections Care and Conservation Plan*.

2. Conservation principles

- 2.1. RCS England Museums takes a strategic, risk management approach to collections care by carrying out regular assessments of collections and identifying priorities from their outcomes; and by taking into account relevant standards and frameworks such as the Collections Trust 'Benchmarks in Collections Care', BSI PAS 198 'Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections' and SPECTRUM 5.1.
- 2.2. RCS England strives to provide an appropriate climate of temperature, relative humidity and light levels in a pollution and pest-free environment that achieves a satisfactory balance between the long-term preservation of the objects and specimens, and accessibility to staff and external users.

2.3. Conservation treatments are prioritised within the framework of resources available and are guided by:

- *Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974*
- *COSHH Regulations 2002*
- *Department for Culture, Media and Sport Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (2005)*
- *Museum Association (MA) Code of Ethics (2015)*
- *Human Tissue Authority (HTA) Code C: Anatomical examination (2021)*
- *Human Tissue Authority (HTA Code C, Standards and Guidance (2021)*
- *Human Tissue Authority (HTA Code of Practice D: Public Display (2021)*
- *Human Tissue Authority (HTA Code D, Standards and Guidance (2021)*
- *The Institute of Conservation (ICON) Code of Conduct*

2.4. All conservation treatments carried out on objects are documented in the Collection Management System (CMS).

2.5. Collections care is the responsibility of all Museums staff. RCS England will employ professional, qualified conservation and curatorial personnel and provide appropriate training, risk assessments and standard operating procedures for them and for properly supervised volunteers when working on collections. All Museums staff are made familiar with this policy at induction and are asked to review it annually. The policy is published on the RCS England and Hunterian Museums websites and is highlighted to researchers where necessary.

2.6. Where skills are not available in house for a particular process or material, resources will be provided for external expertise. External conservators will normally be included on the Institute of Conservation's (Icon) Conservation Register and where possible accredited.

2.7. Collections care needs, risks and activities will be communicated within the Museums teams. If required they will be reported through the Director of Museums and Special Collections to the Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection and the Library, Museums and Archives Committee (LMAC).

2.8. RCS England Museums store some collections in commercial, off-site storage. These commercial partners are responsible for monitoring the storage environment and ensuring that standards are maintained, and data shared.

2.9. Where collections material is stored with commercial storage partners, no conservation work is permitted to be carried out by the partner organisation. Handling of collections is not permitted without advanced consent and the option for RCS England Museums staff to be present.

3. Preventive measures

3.1. Preventive conservation covers the measures necessary to reduce the risk of, or slow down, the deterioration of objects, specimens and structures. The necessary preventive measures are based on a thorough understanding of how objects and specimens react to their environment and deteriorate physically or chemically. A preventive conservation strategy is the primary objective in RCS England Museums approach to collections care, supported by interventive approaches where necessary.

- 3.2. RCS England will provide sufficient secure space in a suitable condition to store the collections.
- 3.3. Access to stores will be limited to Museums staff, suitably trained volunteers, and essential maintenance personnel. Where access is necessary for the latter, the Museums Department will be consulted and with sufficient notice access will be given and supervised. If bringing material to researchers elsewhere in the building is impracticable or will involve unacceptable risk of damage to collections, such external users will be granted supervised access to the stores.
- 3.4. Cleaning of display and storage areas will be undertaken by, or overseen by, Museums staff.
- 3.5. Appropriate levels of security will be provided, including closed-circuit television in museum and reading areas and authorised key allocation systems.
- 3.5. Collections will be displayed and stored in an environment that minimizes their rate of deterioration. Accordingly, all stores, display areas and galleries will be monitored continually for temperature and relative humidity (and if necessary, UV light and pollution), and data extracted monthly. The Conservator is responsible for this task and ensures the correct environmental conditions are being met and maintained.
- 3.6. Appropriate storage materials will be employed (for example, acid-free boxes).
- 3.7. Pest control measures will be deployed, and pest risks monitored.
- 3.8. Hazardous material will be segregated, and appropriate risk signage displayed.
- 3.9. Human remains will be stored in defined areas, in accordance with the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) regulations and most recent governmental guidelines, for example, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005). Visual assessments to ensure continued security is maintained and any acute changes to conditions identified will be undertaken monthly for both human remains on display and in store. A more detailed condition assessment of all collections is conducted as detailed in *RCS England Museums Collections Care and Conservation Plan*.
- 3.10. Measures will be taken over and above those necessary for the day-to-day protection of the collections to provide emergency arrangements and facilities in the event of disastrous damage to the collections, as detailed in the *RCS England Museums Emergency Plan*, with which all staff are made familiar with during induction training and asked to review annually.

4. Interventive conservation

- 4.1. Prioritised conservation plans will be devised for each collection and the highest-risk items treated within available resources each year.
- 4.2. Appropriate safe facilities will be provided for hazardous material work.

- 4.3. External funding will be sought for high priority treatment that is beyond existing Museums resources.
- 4.4. Only suitably qualified, experienced and, where possible, accredited external professionals will be engaged to treat the collections.
- 4.5. Staff time and other resources will be dedicated to researching and improving conservation methods in appropriate areas.

5. Use and movement

- 5.1. Collections will be condition assessed before they are used/handled e.g. for display/research.
- 5.2. Collections movement and handling guidelines (for example in *RCS England Museums Documentation Procedural Manual*) will be followed, and in addition:
 - 5.2.1. Details of hands-on access for researchers can be found in *RCS England Museums Research Policy*
 - 5.2.2. Human remains falling under the Human Tissue Act (2004) will be used and moved in line with Human Tissue Authority guidelines, licence agreements and RCS England's internal procedures; and will be treated respectfully.
 - 5.2.3. Standard handling and storage procedures are followed when specimens are deployed for training and learning within the building wherever feasible.
- 5.3. Users will be provided with relevant equipment (for example, gloves, bookrests) and information (for example, handling guidelines and risk assessments) to minimise risk of damage during use.
- 5.4. Material will be withdrawn from use if deemed at risk (in which case, it will be assessed and if treatment is needed, added to conservation priorities). If material is no longer suitable for use, physical or digital copies, will be considered to ensure continued access.
- 5.5. Material will be assessed before movement, and appropriate measures taken to protect the material and the handlers: for large material, external operatives may be necessary, and resources will be provided to this end.

6. Loans and acquisitions

- 6.1. Conservation or curatorial staff will undertake conservation reports, risk assessments and photography of material prior to acquisition, display and loans out.
- 6.2. Loans in will be assessed upon arrival and compared with the lender's condition report (see also *RCS England Collections Development Policy* and *RCS England Museums Loans Policy*).

- 6.3. Loans material may be withdrawn from the proposed use at any time (for example, the loan or acquisition rejected) if the risk to objects/specimens is unacceptably high.
- 6.4. Incoming material will be kept separate from collections until suitably quarantined to ensure there is no pest or mould activity.
- 6.5. The Conservation staff will not carry out work on any loaned objects/specimens without securing written permission from the legitimate title holder.
- 6.6. Destructive techniques of study should be taken only when no suitable alternatives exist; see also *RCS England Museums Research Policy*.

References

Collections Trust 'Benchmarks in Collection Care

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/benchmarks-in-collections-care-2-0/>

Collections Trust SPECTRUM 5.1

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/>

COSHH Regulations 2002

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/nanotechnology/coshh.htm>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005)

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/GuidanceHumanRemains11Oct.pdf>

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>

[Human Tissue Authority](#)

[Codes of Practice | Human Tissue Authority \(hta.gov.uk\)](#)

The Human Tissue Act 2004

<https://www.hta.gov.uk/guidance-professionals/hta-legislation/human-tissue-act-2004>

The Institute of Conservation (Icon) Code of Conduct

https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_code_of_conduct.pdf

Museum Association (MA) Code of Ethics (2015)

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>