
University of Sheffield Heritage Collections: Acquisition and Disposal Policy

Governing Body	University of Sheffield
Approved by governing body	Library Executive Board
Policy is due for review	May 2025

1. University Heritage Collection statement of purpose

The University of Sheffield's Heritage Collection consist of thousands of objects acquired through research, commission, donation, purchase, loan and gift since the University's foundation in 1905.

The University of Sheffield incorporates a heritage collection that is used regularly for teaching, supporting academic research, student, staff and public engagement.

The collection tells the history of the University that maintains a strong commitment to the city and people of Sheffield which is represented and shown through the strength of the Heritage Collections held at the University.

To include heritage objects that have a key relationship and provenance with the University and Sheffield.

Please refer to the Heritage Strategy (2019).¹

2. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and /or geographic areas to which the collections relate

- 2.1.1 **Portraits:** portraits in oil, watercolour and pencil, primarily of Vice Chancellors, Pro-Chancellor, Chancellors, Professors, Nobel Prize winners and other individuals associated with the University.
- 2.1.2 **Contemporary paintings:** abstract and conceptual artworks either commissioned or donated to the collection.
- 2.1.3 **Buildings and landscapes:** paintings and prints of buildings on the campus, in Sheffield, its surrounding districts and other areas in the UK.
- 2.1.4 **Loaned paintings:** loaned paintings to The University of Sheffield Heritage Collection from institutional and private lenders
- 2.1.5 **Turner Museum of Glass:** founded in 1943 by Professor W.E.S. Turner who was the Head of the Department of Glass Technology at the University since

¹ Heritage Collections Strategy 2019 https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/heritage/strategy_2019

1915. The collection consists of Turner's unique collection showcasing pieces by major European and American glassmakers.

- 2.1.6 **Alfred Denny Museum of Zoology:** zoological specimens dating 19th century originally collected by Alfred Denny, the University's first Professor of Biology, from 1905. The collection includes invertebrate and vertebrae specimens, wet and dry specimens and taxidermy.
- 2.1.7 **Medals:** a collection of medals given to students as awards for their research and commitments. Includes President's chain
- 2.1.8 **University Silver, silver-plate and metalwork:** silverware given to the VC which is used for decoration and events. Includes trophies and plaques.
- 2.1.9 **Sculptures and 3D:** portrait busts of notable academics and alumni, site-specific 3D installations, some associated with a department in the University and installed in/outside the department building for prosperity, others to create a vibrant sense of place on the campus.
- 2.1.10 **Ceremonial objects:** silver mace and silver dinnerware put out on decorative display for ceremonial events and dinners.
- 2.1.11 **Historical scientific instruments:** 19th and 20th century instruments used for scientific and engineering purposes, on display in department buildings associated with the use of the instrument.

3. Criteria governing future acquisition policy including the subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas and any collections which will not be subject to further acquisition.

Nothing to note at this point.

Areas for development:

- 3.1 **Portraits:** Notable and leading figures (men and women) in the University who have made a significant contribution to the University through research and development in their key areas and their high-profile position. To have diversity represented in the portraits to show equality and inclusion at the university. To include current contemporary portraiture and posthumous portraits to fill in gaps in the collection – acceptance of loans-in will be considered for this purpose.
- 3.2 **Academic Commemoratives:** Certificates, trophies and medals given to current students and alumni, awarded for their achievements at the University.
- 3.3 **University and Sheffield buildings and landscapes:** paintings and 3D objects celebrating the changing landscape of the University campus and surrounding areas of Sheffield; to show the changes in the landscape which contributes to the heritage of Sheffield.
- 3.4 **Around the UK and other countries:** representation of local, regional, national and international areas which represent the rich diversity at the University and its associated locations for student and alumni inclusion.

- 3.5 **Contemporary and conceptual artworks:** acquired through specific projects working with departments to develop a rich and diverse heritage and to challenge people's conception of art. Including site-specific artwork – 3D and digital installations, abstract and innovative works of art.
- 3.6 **Turner Museum of Glass:** The main area of collecting will be in a contemporary studio glass that may involve commissioning new work from glass makers. The criteria for selection is on both aesthetic and technical grounds. Other pieces of glass will be collected if it is of particular interest or relates to the history of the Museum, the University, the Department of Glass Technology, Sheffield or Professor W E S Turner.
- 3.7 **The Alfred Denny Museum of Zoology:** It is not the intention to add new acquisitions to the collection, however, very occasionally new material is donated to the Museum and if this is deemed suitable by the curator and University Heritage Collections Manager, it is added to the collection following the correct documentation procedure for the University Heritage Collections.

4. Limitations on collecting

The University of Sheffield Heritage Collection recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Arts Council England Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

5. Collecting policies of other museums and academic institutions

The University of Sheffield Heritage Collection will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and academic institutions collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference is made to the following museums and academic institutions:

- 5.1 Museums Sheffield (Weston Park Museum), Sheffield
- 5.2 Kelham Island Museum, Sheffield
- 5.3 Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham MBC
- 5.4 Cannon Hall, Barnsley MBC
- 5.5 Doncaster Art Gallery and Museum
- 5.6 Sheffield Hallam University
- 5.7 University of Leeds
- 5.8 University of York

6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

Library Executive Board and Heritage Collections Advisory Panel will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the university itself, having regard to the interests of other museums and academic institutions.

8. Acquisition procedures

- a. The Heritage Collections Advisory Panel will make decisions on major acquisitions which include commissions, a significant investment in the display of new acquisition, are of a significant value, from high-profile donations and long-term loans in and out of the collection, following the guidelines set in the University Heritage Collections Acquisitions Policy.²
- b. Terms and conditions will be agreed by the Heritage Collection Advisory Panel and the donor for all donations and long term loans. Donations with a clear and valid title of ownership will be preferred to long term loans. Donors will be strongly encouraged to offer a monetary donation along with donations and long term loans to support the management, use and display of the object or collection.
- c. Terms and conditions should also be agreed between the panel and any artist commissioned to donate and/or produce an artwork.
- d. Faculties and Departments, including Professional Services will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the Heritage Collections Advisory Panel is satisfied that the University can acquire valid title to the item in question. It is important to state and clarify proof of ownership before acquiring any of the above from donors.
- e. Gift, loans and commissions project managed by the Development, Alumni Relations and Events team will inform the University Heritage Collections Manager who will play a vital role in the project so that the acquisition correctly enters the collection.
- f. Special project managed acquisitions are defined as 'major acquisitions' that are donations or commissions received from high-profile donors, are existing works or commissions by significant artists, require investigation in their display or placement within the campus (large installations) and are of value as mentioned on the University's General Property Insurance Policy, must be declared to the President & Vice Chancellor and the Provost & Deputy Vice Chancellor before acceptance.
- g. The University will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom.

² Refer to Acquisition and Disposal Policy for Heritage Collections section 3

h. In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from 1 November 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the University will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The University will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department of Culture Media and Sport in 2005.³

i. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the University will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

j. The University will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the Heritage Collections Advisory Panel has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures, such as reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales)⁴ or reporting finds through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).

- Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the University is either:
- Acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- Acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded
- Acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin
- In possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

k. In these cases, the University will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

l. The University Heritage Collections Manager will work with Faculties to advise which material created through research or owned by the Faculty should be designated as heritage objects or collections. The final decision on designation will rest with the head of the relevant department.

m. The University Heritage Collection does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

³ See appendix 1 - UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/1970-convention/text-of-the-convention/>

⁴ See appendix 2 - Treasure Act 1996 <https://finds.org.uk/treasure>

9. Spoliation

The University of Sheffield Heritage Collection will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period',⁵ issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

10. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects, and human remains

The University's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the "Guidance for the care of human remains in museums" issued by DCMS in 2005)⁶, objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The University will take such decisions on a case by case basis, within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 12a-12d, 12g and 12s below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the "Guidance for the care of human remains in museums".

11. Management of archives

As the University of Sheffield holds / intends to acquire archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).⁷

12. Disposal procedures

Disposal preliminaries

- a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.
- b. By definition, the University has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the University Heritage Collection.
- c. The University will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.
- d. When disposal of a University Heritage object is being considered, the University will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may

⁵ <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/spoliation-of-works-of-art-during-the-nazi-holocaust-and-world-war-ii-period-issued-for-non-national-museums/>

⁶ See appendix 3 - Guidance for the care of human remains in museums
<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/guidance-for-the-care-of-human-remains-in-museums/>

⁷ See appendix 4 – Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries
<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/code-of-practice-on-archives/>

include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

Motivation for disposal and method of disposal

e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 12g-12s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.

f. The University will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

The disposal decision-making process

g. Whether the disposal is motivated either by curatorial or financial reasons, the decision to dispose of material from the University Heritage Collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including the public benefit, the implications for the University Heritage Collection and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. External expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the University will also be sought.

Responsibility for disposal decision-making

h. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the University acting on the advice of professional heritage staff, if any, and not of the manager of the collection acting alone.

Use of proceeds of sale

i. Any monies received by the University governing body from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of heritage collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the heritage collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from MLA.

j. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the MLA Accreditation standard.

Disposal by gift or sale

k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the

Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

m. The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the University may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

Disposal by exchange

n. The nature of disposal by exchange means that the University will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited Museum or academic institution. The governing body will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

o. In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or unaccredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 12a-12d and 12g-12h will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 12p-12s.

p. If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific MLA Accredited Museum, other Accredited Museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.

q. If the exchange is proposed with a non- Accredited Museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the University will make an announcement in the Museums Journal and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

r. Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the University Heritage Collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

Documenting disposal

s. Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with Spectrum Standard Procedure on deaccession and disposal.