



Museum of Domestic  
Design & Architecture

# Collections Review and Rationalisation Policy

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**Sian Woodward (Collections Manager)**

Approved:

*Gareth Williams*

Chair of the MoDA Advisory Board

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MoDA Collections Centre  
Middlesex University  
9 Boulevard Drive, Beaufort Park  
London NW9 5HF

Tel: +44 (0)20 8411 5244  
Email: [moda@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:moda@mdx.ac.uk)  
[www.moda.mdx.ac.uk](http://www.moda.mdx.ac.uk)



**Middlesex  
University  
London**

## **Definition of a museum**

*“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”*

Museum definition adopted by the International Council of Museums (Icom), 2022.

## **Definition of Collections Rationalisation**

‘Improving public benefit by refining collections in line with the museum’s statement of purpose.’

Collections review enables a museum to improve its understanding of a collection so that it can be used more effectively.

Reviews are often the first stage of rationalising collections, which can lead to the deaccessioning and disposal of objects. However, there are many other reasons to review collections. These include: understanding the significance of held collections; identifying opportunities to develop under-used collections; getting new insights into what your users find interesting about your objects; and planning future research, use and collections care.

Collections reviews need to follow a defined framework to ensure that the process of review and its outcomes are captured and recorded in a systematic and transparent way.

## **Principles of Collections Review and Rationalisation**

1. Collections will be used to achieve our purpose:

*The mission of the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA) is to preserve and hold in trust for society its internationally important collections relating to British domestic design and architecture 1870-1960, and by doing so to contribute to Middlesex University’s transformative programme of education, research and engagement.*

2. Collections will be used effectively to benefit the public.

Public benefit is achieved by using the collections for Display/ Research/ Handling/

Demonstration/ Spares/ Set dressing. This activity may be organised by the museum or by other organisations to which we lend items. It is necessary, from time to time to reassess collections' potential for public benefit in relation to our purpose, plans and policies as well as to take account of changes to legal and ethical considerations. Our users will benefit from good collection management practices which improve the potential for the effective use of the collections.

3. Collections Reviews are undertaken for a range of reasons. At MoDA, these will include:
  - to fully understand the gaps in the collection
  - to develop a list of priorities to enable future collecting
  - to improve our knowledge about an area of the collection
  - to understand the documentation, storage and care needs of our collections
4. Collections Reviews may lead to a need to rationalise part of the collection.
5. Collection Rationalisation will cover a range of options. Benefit to the public must be demonstrated in the choice of option made. Alternatives, not in order of priority are:
  - Allocating items a different use within the museum
  - Returning items on loan
  - Converting loans to the museum to gifts to the museum
  - Disposal by gift to another Accredited museum or if this is not possible to other organisations or individuals
  - Disposal by sale to another Accredited museum or if this is not possible to other organisations or individuals
  - Disposal in cases of restitution, repatriation or spoliation
  - Disposal by recycling
  - Disposal by destruction – full or partial, in cases where no other option exists
6. Collections rationalisation will observe the ethical and legal considerations outlined in the Museum Accreditation standard and the MA Code of Ethics. Ethical matters relating to collections review and rationalisation include the process taking place:
  - within a clearly defined collections policy
  - on the advice of a range of staff (not an individual)
  - when agreed by the governing body in the case of disposal
  - with the intention that items remain in the public domain whenever possible
  - when it is unlikely to damage public trust in museums
  - when it is likely to increase public benefit deriving from the collections
  - when financially-motivated disposal is only implemented in exceptional circumstances.
7. Decisions made relating to collections rationalisation may be affected by legal restrictions arising from factors such as:
  - legislation relating to the governing body of the museum
  - legislation relating to the museum's collections
  - the governing constitution of the museum
  - museum management agreements
  - conditions attached to gifts, bequests, purchases, loans and grants

- the ownership of items including those not yet accessioned into the collection

If doubts on legal restrictions exist, appropriate advice will be sought.

8. The collections rationalisation process and its documentation will take account of the requirements of the Museum Accreditation scheme, the MA Code of Ethics and the guidelines in the MA Disposal Toolkit. In addition to ethical and legal matters, the implementation of the rationalisation process must demonstrate that the requirements have been met and guidelines followed. The process will differ depending on whether items are to be permanently disposed of from the collection, whether they have or have not been accessioned into the collection or are on loan to or from the museum. Documentation requirements are given in the museum's Documentation Procedural Manual.
9. The selection of items for rationalisation and the choice of a new owner will be subject to formal processes and written criteria with assistance from appropriate specialists. Formal processes and criteria will ensure that consistency and transparency in collections rationalisation can be demonstrated. Specialist knowledge and advice will support the museum to make informed decisions on how the public benefit potential of items can best be achieved.
10. Our plans, policies and collection management arrangements will be reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect any changes in our approach to the development and use of the collections. Collections rationalisation provides an opportunity to review plans, policies and practices relating to acquisition, disposal, loans and other aspects of collection management to ensure that the collections are being used effectively for public benefit. Any changes made will be consistent with the prevailing Museum Accreditation standard and with ethical and legal considerations.
11. Public trust in the museum as holders of the collections will be maintained by consultation and communication. We recognise the need to raise understanding both inside and outside the museum of the public benefits arising from collections rationalisation. This includes respecting the sensibilities of those who have donated items to the museum, stakeholders and special interest groups.



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Page 1 of 1



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