

**Minimum Maintenance
Requirements
&
Closure and Disposal
Procedures**

**for
University Museums & Collections**

*Standing Committee on Museums and Collections
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Australia*

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Minimum Maintenance Requirements & Closure and Disposal Procedures for University Museums and Collections

This document addresses two issues:

- A** The minimum maintenance requirements for a departmentally operated museum; and
- B** The proper closure and disposal procedures to be followed in the event that a department cannot continue to maintain a museum or departmental collection.

The term 'department' should be taken to include also schools and similar groupings within the University. The term 'Vice-Chancellor' should be taken to indicate the Chief Executive Officer of the University.

The document does not set out to cover other aspects of policies for departmental museums and collections. Reference to the Cinderella Reports for guidance on other aspects is recommended.

McMichael et al, (1996) *Cinderella Collections: University Museums and Collections in Australia 1996*, AV-CC, Canberra, Australia, 226 pp.

Yerbury et al, (1998) *Transforming Cinderella Collections: The Management and Conservation of Australian University Museums, Collections and Herbaria*, AV-CC, Canberra, Australia, 331 pp.

A Minimum Maintenance Requirements

- 1** It must be recognised that no matter where a museum or collection is located within the University, the objects therein are the property of the University, not of the Department in which they may be located.
- 2** The responsibilities of the Department should be for providing:
 - i adequate appropriate space to ensure that the objects are safely housed
 - ii adequate staff to ensure the physical well-being of the objects and their essential documentation
 - iii adequate funds to meet the above
- 3** One person should be designated as responsible for the museum or collection and this responsibility should be recognised both in the duty statement of the person in charge and in the allowance of sufficient time to enable her or him to carry out this responsibility.
- 4** There should be provision for access to the museum or collection by researchers, students or the public, or a combination of these.

5 There should be supervision at both Departmental level and above to ensure that the responsibilities of both the Department and the person in charge of the museum or collection are being properly met.

6 If the Department finds that it cannot meet its responsibilities to its museum or collection or that it does not wish to continue to do so, there should be a mechanism at a higher level within the University to enable consideration of other options. These might include central control by the University or closure and disposal.

B Closure and Disposal Procedures

- i These procedures refer only to the disposal of objects in the collections of the museum. All other items (for example, furniture and equipment) would be subject to the normal disposal procedures of the University.
- ii These procedures should be applied in the event not only of the closure of a museum or collection, but also of the disposal of individual objects deemed to be surplus to the requirements of the University.
- iii In the event of the disposal of individual objects, or the closure of a museum or collection and any subsequent disposal, it must be borne in mind throughout that the objects in the collections are the property of the University and can be disposed of unilaterally neither by the Department nor by any one person.

The following steps in the de-accessioning and disposal procedure are recommended:

- 1** Each object in the collection should be carefully checked to confirm that it is owned by the University

and that the University has the full right of disposal.

2 Any conditions specified or implied in the original acquisitions agreement should be identified and honoured.

3 The de-accessioning and disposal of an object should be on the basis of a recommendation from the person in charge of the collection and also from the Department to the Vice-Chancellor, whose written approval must be obtained. The Vice-Chancellor may wish to delegate this authority.

4 For the de-accessioning and disposal of a number of objects or a whole collection, a full list of the objects should be submitted as part of the recommendation. The recommendation should not be for the disposal of an unspecified, unlisted number of objects comprising a collection.

5 The recommendation should provide clear reasons for the proposed de-accessioning and disposal. These might include:

- lack of historical relevance to the University
- lack of relevance to the work or interests of the Museum or Collection
- lack of relevance to the work or interests of the Department
- lack of relevance to the University's long term strategic plan
- absence of clear title
- damage or serious deterioration in condition

- theft or loss
- repatriation of cultural property
- closure of the Museum or Collection

6 The recommendation should indicate the method of disposal to be employed. These could be one of the following, whichever is appropriate:

- destruction
- confirmation of loss or disappearance through theft or some other way
- return to original donor or owner
- transfer to another department or area of the University
- transfer to another institution outside the University
- sale by auction

7 Under no circumstances should objects be disposed of by dumping through the city garbage collection system.

8 Objects should not be disposed of by gift or sale to individuals, either members of staff or people outside the University.

9 The recommended method of disposal should be either by return to the original donor or owner (or heirs), or by transfer to another department within the University or another institution elsewhere, that shares the standards and professional objectives of the Museum or Collection and has a similar policy on disposal.

- 10** Where the object is returned to the original donor or where the transfer is to another department or institution, all documentation, or copies thereof, should accompany the object.
- 11** The recommendation to the Vice-Chancellor should indicate destination (i.e. name of proposed recipient) of the object after disposal.
- 12** A clear record should be kept in the Accessions Register, or elsewhere as appropriate, of the disposal and destination of the object or collection.
- 13** Even when the University disposes of a complete collection, the Accessions Register should not be destroyed. It should be retained by the Museum, together with any original object documentation that has not been transferred as part of the disposal. If the accompanying material should be deposited in the University Archives.
- 14** Except where an object is transferred to another department or outside institution, it is advisable to remove or obliterate the accession number that is on the object.

This guide was prepared for the Standing Committee of the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors Conference by Professor Barrie Reynolds, Ms Vanessa Mack and Dr Peter Stanbury.

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The Standing Committee is composed of representatives from all universities in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The Committee was formed in 1996, after the publication of the first *Cinderella Collections* report. It is chaired by Professor Di Yerbury, AM, Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University.

The Standing Committee meets three times a year. Its activities include:

- compilation, circulation and publication of information relevant to university museums, collections and herbaria
- professional development, mentorship and networking opportunities for staff associated with university museums
- provision of funds for research partnerships
- organisation of joint exhibitions and promotional projects

