

# **museum**

National Museum of Ireland

*Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann*

## **Collections Care & Conservation**

<b>Policy No: NMI-POL-CCC-001</b>	<b>Version No: 2020-06-12-v12-Final</b>
<b>Date Approved: 25 June 2020</b>	<b>Approved By: Board</b>
<b>Number of Pages: 5</b>	<b>Signature:</b>
<b>Review Period: 5 Years</b>	<b>Division Responsible: Collections &amp; Learning</b>
<b>Implementation Date: 25-6-2020</b>	<b>Review Date: 21-6-2023</b>

## NMI Collections Care and Conservation Policy

This National Museum of Ireland (NMI) policy addresses all aspects of collections care at the National Museum of Ireland. It acts as a framework to ensure the safety of museum heritage objects and their prevention from harm through known agents of deterioration. The same principles are applied whether the object is on display, in storage, undergoing treatment or analysis, during transport, or while on loan. The policy also sets standards for the approach to remedial conservation where objects may require direct intervention. There are separate policies for **Collections Security** and for **Collections Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response**.

### Legislative Basis

The NMI manages its collections of Museum Heritage Objects under powers conferred by section 11 of the **National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997**. This states that:

*11. — (2) The Board shall have all such powers as it considers necessary or expedient for the performance of its functions under this Act including, but without prejudice to the foregoing, the following powers:*

*(a) to conserve and restore the museum heritage objects in the collection of the Museum,*

The term “museum heritage object” is defined in the 1997 Act as:

*(a) any object in the collection of the Museum on the Museum establishment day,*

*(b) any object (including archaeological objects, objects relating to the decorative arts or natural sciences or to history or industry or folklife) over 25 years old considered appropriate by the Board for inclusion in the collection of the Museum concerning human life in Ireland, the natural history of Ireland, and of the relations of Ireland with other countries, and*

*(c) any other similar objects;*

In order for the Board of NMI to fulfil its statutory role to conserve the objects in its care, it is necessary to minimise risks from known agents of deterioration, including physical forces, pests, light, relative humidity, temperature and pollutants.

NMI has powers under the **National Monuments Act 1930 to 2014** in licensing all conservation work and destructive analysis of archaeological objects from Ireland as defined by the legislation. NMI is responsible for issuing a Licence to Alter, the application process for which is managed by NMI and has conservation implications for the objects concerned.

Section 25 of the National Monuments Act 1930, as amended by Section 20 of the National Monuments Amendment Act, 1994 states:

*It shall not be lawful for any person to injure, deface or destroy, clean, restore or sample by cutting, drilling or other process any archaeological object, nor shall it be lawful for any person to alter any archaeological object otherwise than under and in accordance with a licence in that behalf granted under this section.*

The legal definition of an 'archaeological object' is set out in Section 2 of the National Monuments Act 1930, as amended by Section 14 of the National Monuments Amendment Act, 1994, which states:

*14. – 'archaeological object' means any chattel whether in a manufactured or partly manufactured or an unmanufactured state which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human, animal or plant remains;*

It is NMI policy to apply the guidelines detailed in the NMI Guidelines 'Advice Notes for Excavators', adherence to which is a condition of an excavation licence. This covers conservation treatments and destructive analysis for all archaeological objects from Ireland.

## Definitions

As a member of CEN (Comité Européen de Normalisation/European Committee for Standardisation) Ireland is bound by definitions set out in **European Standard EN 15898:2011** 'Conservation of cultural property - Main general terms and definitions.' The following definitions are adopted here:

- **Conservation:** measures and actions aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage while respecting its significance, including its accessibility to present and future generations
- **Preventive conservation:** measures and actions aimed at avoiding or minimizing future damage, deterioration and loss and, consequently any invasive intervention
- **Collection care:** preventive conservation applied to a collection
- **Remedial conservation:** actions applied directly to an object to arrest deterioration and/or to limit damage

Other definitions relating to collections and their care at the NMI:

- A 'Collection Area' is any space where an object or collection material is stored or displayed on either a temporary or permanent basis.
- 'NMI Collections' encompass the core collection (see NMI Acquisitions Policy for definition), Archives (see NMI Archives Policy for definition), Library (see NMI Library Policy for definition), and Education handling collections (see NMI Learning Policy for definition).

## Principles

- The NMI, through its Conservation Department, will set and oversee the implementation of CEN compliant standards for the care and conservation of the NMI Collections.
- The same standards will apply for the collections whether they are on an NMI site or are off-site for whatever purpose (loan, research, storage, conservation treatment).
- These standards will also be applied (with agreement of owners) to external objects entering any NMI Collections Areas.

## Preventive Conservation & Collections Care

Preventative conservation is a sustainable, resource-efficient approach to the cost of maintaining collections in the long term. It depends on monitoring and controlling agents of deterioration before damage can occur and is the primary mechanism for ensuring collections care.

To be successful this requires objects to be accommodated in an appropriate environment. It also requires the collaboration of all staff. Some have key roles, in particular the Head of Conservation is responsible for the physical welfare of the NMI collections and setting standards in training for preventive conservation and collections care; the Keepers have overall responsibility for the collections in their Divisions; the Head of Operations is responsible for the maintenance and management of NMI buildings; the Head of Facilities is responsible for cleaning regimes in NMI buildings. Our approach to preventative conservation and collections care will be to:

1. Collaborate across all NMI Departments to ensure appropriate management of building fabric, fixtures and their cleaning schedules to ensure a suitable environment for collections.
2. Inspection and maintenance schedules will be maintained for all buildings housing collections.
3. Evaluate and manage activities involving collections, or taking place in Collections Areas, to reduce the risk of damage, deterioration or loss.
4. Ensure wherever possible that objects are kept in buildings that can support and sustain the optimal environmental conditions necessary for collection care, monitoring and management.
5. Ensure use of materials, furniture and fittings of an appropriate standard approved by the NMI Conservation Department, to prevent damage or deterioration when treating, storing, moving, and/or displaying collections.
6. Undertake ongoing environmental monitoring of Collections Areas to identify potential agents of deterioration relating to light levels, temperature and humidity or any other factor deemed of relevance to a particular collection by the Conservation Department.
7. Respond to issues identified during environmental monitoring in a timely fashion to address their causes before damage can occur to collections.
8. Apply an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan across all NMI sites, with appropriate quarantine and treatment procedures to minimise the transfer of, and damage caused by pests.
9. Use methods rooted in good practice and approved by the NMI Conservation Department when handling, moving or otherwise working with collections.

## Remedial Conservation

Remedial conservation takes place in the course of fieldwork as well as within the museum. The aim is to stabilise individual objects or collections, to prolong their lifespan, and to enhance intellectual access and accuracy in accordance with ethical guidelines.

1. Remedial treatment will be carried out by a qualified Conservator, in line with sectoral standards, best practice and ethical guidelines. For Conservation, NMI follows the ethical guidelines of ECCO (European Confederation of Conservator-Restorer Organisation).

2. Conservation Treatments will be determined by NMI Conservators. Complex or innovative treatments, and work by contract conservators, are to be agreed with the Head of Conservation and the relevant Keeper as required.
3. Remedial treatments will adopt the approach of 'minimum intervention for maximum preservation'.
4. Choice of treatment should be appropriate to the proposed use of the object, its significance, and the resources available to properly carry out the treatment.
5. Priority will be given to objects required for display, loan or publication, research or at risk of active deterioration.
6. Ownership of objects must be established prior to treatment and appropriate permission granted if not the property of NMI.
7. Treatment methods will use stable and tested materials that, as far as possible, are reversible and do not compromise the intrinsic nature of the object, future treatment or use.
8. Conservation treatment reports will be produced by Conservators, filed, and made available through the appropriate collections management systems.
9. Scientific investigation and technical examination of objects from the collections is carried out to better understand an object's history, technology of manufacture, nature of materials, and to inform and improve conservation treatments. Destructive analysis, involving sampling of objects is subject to a written proposal submitted to the relevant Keeper and for archaeological objects from Ireland will be subject to the Licence to Alter application process.