

# **museum**

National Museum of Ireland

*Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann*

## Collections Disposal Policy

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## National Museum of Ireland – Collections Disposal Policy

The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) may wish to dispose of Museum Heritage Objects in its collections from time to time for a variety of reasons. This policy covers all disposals of objects by the NMI from its Core Collections. For the purposes of this Policy ‘disposal’ refers to the permanent removal of ownership of an object from the National Museum of Ireland. The term ‘de-accession’ is used to signify that an object has been removed from the Core Collection, but may be retained within the ownership of NMI. This policy does not cover the choice to acquire objects in the first place, or to decline to acquire archaeological objects. These are covered under the Acquisition Policy. Specific issues around de-accessioning, reburial, or repatriation of human remains are covered in the Human Remains Policy.

### 1 Legislative Basis

The State owns the collections managed by NMI and has done since the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act, 1877 established what is now known as the National Museum of Ireland. Further provisions relating to State ownership of museum heritage objects were provided under the terms of statutes including but not restricted to, *The National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014* and *The National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997*.

For Archaeological Objects, the Director of the NMI may carry out disposals under powers conferred by Section 68 of the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997. Where an Archaeological Object is not in the possession of NMI, disposal is still controlled by NMI. Section 68 states that the National Monuments Act 1994 is amended as follows:

*3.—(a) Subject to the provisions of this section, where, after the commencement of this section, an archaeological object becomes the property of the State, the Director may, at his or her discretion, if he or she is of opinion that the object is not of sufficient archaeological or historical interest to justify its retention by the State, dispose of the object by whatever means he or she thinks fit.*

*(b) Where an archaeological object becomes the property of the State and the Director is of opinion that the object is predominantly more of local rather than national interest, the Director may place the object in the care of a designated museum.*

*(c) An archaeological object that has been placed in the care of a designated museum under paragraph (b) shall not be disposed of other than by means of its transfer into the care of another designated museum or the National Museum of Ireland.*

The National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 establishes how disposals are to be managed in relation to the National Library of Ireland, but does not cover this for NMI. The following principles are based on best practice as outlined in the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland operated by the Heritage Council, the Museums Association disposal toolkit and guidelines, and the international museum standard SPECTRUM 5.0

### 2 Core Collections

1. Museum Heritage Objects (including Archaeological Objects) that have been acquired by the NMI are registered in systems dating back to the implementation of the Science & Art Museum

Act on 14 August 1877. All objects acquired by NMI since that date and registered in these systems are considered 'accessioned objects' that are part of the NMI 'Core Collection'.

2. Also included in the NMI Core Collection are major collections of objects transferred from the Museum of Irish Industry (MII), Royal Dublin Society (RDS), Royal Irish Academy (RIA), Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (RSAI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD). These transfers and deposits in the 19<sup>th</sup> century into what is now the National Museum of Ireland are considered museum heritage objects accessioned into the NMI Core Collection.

### 3 Principles for De-Accessioning

1. The NMI will retain all Museum Heritage Objects in its Core Collection unless there are specific exceptional reasons put forward in a written proposal for their de-accession.
2. Any proposal to de-accession a Museum Heritage Object will be submitted in writing and be assessed by an internal panel, and referred to the Director before being submitted to the Board of NMI for consideration. The procedure will include a recommendation from the panel indicating a preference for de-accessioning and/or disposal.
3. Reasons for de-accession of a Museum Heritage Object may include:
  - 3.1. Legal: Lack of title or other legal reasons where the holding of an object in the core collection is brought into question.
  - 3.2. Repatriation: Response to a request to repatriate an object.
  - 3.3. Suitability: The object may be more appropriate to another NMI department (*e.g.* for use in handling collections for public engagement), and transferred accordingly.
  - 3.4. Condition: lack of facilities or resources to carry out necessary level of remedial work to care properly for an object.
  - 3.5. Condition: damaged or deteriorated beyond use.
  - 3.6. Condition: the object represents a health and safety hazard.
4. All actions pertaining to the de-accession of objects will be documented in full. Object records for items that have been de-accessioned will be maintained.
5. The NMI will follow appropriate professional guidelines (SPECTRUM 5.0, published September 2017) when de-accessioning objects. Written applications for de-accessioning will address the following:
  - 5.1. Due diligence will be undertaken to ensure that any object put forward for de-accessioning is the property of NMI. This will include appropriate scrutiny of any factor that may be raised as a challenge to the rightful ownership of any object or collection of objects (including, but not restricted to: proof of ownership, legal title, permits, legislation, ethics, copyright, usage agreements, health and safety, and as appropriate to the nature of the object).
  - 5.2. For objects originally belonging to parent institutions and those responsible for major nineteenth-century transfers (RDS, RIA, RSAI, TCD) the views of the relevant collection stakeholders will be sought.

### 4 Principles for Disposal

1. The NMI will retain all Museum Heritage Objects in its ownership unless there are specific exceptional reasons put forward for their disposal. If the object is accessioned in the core

collection, its de-accession will form part of the disposal proposal process. Any accessioned object must first be de-accessioned before disposal.

2. Any proposal to dispose of a Museum Heritage Object will be submitted in writing and be assessed by an internal panel, and referred to the Director before being submitted to the Board of NMI for consideration.
3. Reasons for disposal of a Museum Heritage Object may include:
  - 3.1. Legal: Lack of title or other legal reasons where the holding of an object in the possession of NMI is brought into question.
  - 3.2. Repatriation: Response to a request to repatriate an object.
  - 3.3. Suitability: The object may be more appropriate to another museum or gallery, and transferred accordingly.
  - 3.4. Condition: lack of facilities or resources to carry out necessary level of remedial work to care properly for an object.
  - 3.5. Condition: damaged or deteriorated beyond use.
  - 3.6. Condition: the object represents a health and safety hazard.
4. All actions pertaining to the disposal of objects will be documented in full and records retained. Object records for items that have been disposed of will be maintained.
5. The NMI will follow appropriate professional guidelines (SPECTRUM 5.0, published September 2017) when disposing of objects.
  - 5.1. Due diligence will be undertaken to ensure that any object put forward for disposal is the property of NMI. This will include appropriate scrutiny of any factor that may be raised as a challenge to the rightful ownership of any object or collection of objects (including, but not restricted to: proof of ownership, legal title, permits, legislation, ethics, copyright, usage agreements, health and safety, and as appropriate to the nature of the object).
  - 5.2. For objects originally belonging to parent institutions and those responsible for major nineteenth-century transfers (RDS, RIA, RSAI, TCD) the views of the relevant collection stakeholders will be sought.
  - 5.3. The proposal will address any specific risks, costs or other relevant constraints that may relate to the safe disposal of the object(s).
  - 5.4. The destination of objects selected for disposal by NMI may include other (but may not be limited to) Irish museums, museums overseas, return to donor, organisations in the public domain, recycling, destruction.
  - 5.5. Objects will not be disposed of in any way that results in financial or commercial gain.