Collections Care & Conservation Policy

Purpose and scope

Special Collections & Archives (SC&A) cares for and makes available in perpetuity the unique and distinctive collections of the University of Liverpool in support of the University’s teaching, research and public engagement. Its full remit is defined in the SC&A Collection Development and Management Policy.

The purpose and scope of this policy is to set out the principles and practices related to the care and conservation of SC&A collections. It is intended to provide guidance for staff and to explain to users the standards and procedures necessary to protect the collections and ensure their continued availability.

SC&A adheres to the principles of preservation and conservation as recommended in the public document British Standard 4971: 2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections. As preservation of collections is a core function of the department, all SC&A staff are responsible for implementing this policy, as appropriate to their roles and responsibilities.

The policy is a high level statement which is complemented by the following documents:

- SC&A Collection Development and Management Policy
- Library Disaster Plan
- Reading Room Regulations & Document Handling Guidelines
- Exhibition loan conditions & application form

Preservation is defined as including all managerial, financial and technical considerations, including storage and accommodation; staffing; policies; and methods, which extend the life of collections and prevent damage to them.

Conservation is defined as direct intervention to either prevent or to make good damage to materials.

Buildings & storage facilities

SC&A houses its collections in secure, environmentally monitored storage areas that conform, as far as possible, to BS 4971:2017.

It is located on the ground floor and basement of the Sydney Jones Library’s Grove Wing. The building is maintained by the University’s Facilities Management department. A substantial refurbishment to the ground floor public access areas was completed in 2008.
There are 4 main store areas, which are mainly shelved with rolling racking and some flat top cases. A separate strong room for the earliest and most valuable collections was refurbished in 2015, with a new environmental monitoring system and shelving installed, and items individually boxed.

It is the responsibility of SC&A staff to inform the Library Building Managers or University Facilities Management, as appropriate, of building defects. SC&A and wider Library staff liaise with Facilities Management on an ongoing basis, and work together on defined projects.

The importance of sustainable future growth space for the collections has been acknowledged by the University, and SC&A staff will be fully involved in future development and building plans.

**Environmental control & monitoring**

A system of environmental control, maintained by the University’s Facilities Management, is operational in the main store areas and is linked directly to systems which generate alerts in the case of malfunction. The strong room is controlled by a separate system which is maintained by an external contractor, and features computerised monitoring of relative humidity and temperature, a control panel in the office area, and a system of alerts and alarms.

Handheld data loggers are present in all stores. Readings are regularly monitored and reports generated every six months.

An environmental control system also operates in the reading room and office areas.

**Security**

Reading room regulations and procedures are designed to protect the collections from theft and vandalism whilst in use. Security cameras are operational in the public areas and basement. The Reading Room and storage areas are protected by controlled keys and swipe card access, as well as an alarm system.

All maintenance staff must gain access to store areas through SC&A staff. External contractors are supervised.

Accessioning and cataloguing processes are in place to ensure material entering SC&A collections is secure and locatable from the outset.

SC&A would follow the CILIP and Antiquarian Booksellers Association (ABA) code of practice *Theft of Books and Manuscripts from Libraries: an advisory code of conduct for booksellers and librarians* should relevant circumstances arise.

**Access**

Access to the collections is provided in an invigilated reading room, where researchers are advised on appropriate handling techniques as detailed in the Handling Guidelines and provided with book supports and weights as appropriate. Researchers must comply with Reading Room Regulations. Use of particularly fragile material may be restricted. A process of filing request slips is in place to ensure use of material can be traced, and signed and dated receipts are retained.
Material is also made available for University teaching, in a designated teaching room within SCA, and with appropriate monitoring and guidance from a member of staff. Use of some vulnerable material may be restricted, or use of a surrogate suggested where available.

**Reprographics**

In the reading room, researchers are permitted to use digital cameras to take photographs, for research purposes only, but they must seek the permission of SC&A staff. The use of flash is not permitted.

Other than the above, material may only be photocopied or digitised by SC&A staff, subject to the format and condition of the item and to copyright and Data Protection legislation. SC&A reserves the right to decline reprographics requests where the risk of damage to the item is too great.

In-house digitisation will be performed on a specialised book scanner or using a handheld camera using book supports, depending on format, size and condition. Some categories of material may need to be digitised elsewhere within the University, or by an outside agency, and SC&A will charge for such work if made by user request.

Other material will be digitised to meet the needs of SC&A and the University of Liverpool Library according to agreed priorities, which make provision for digital preservation.

**Digital preservation**

SC&A recognises the importance of maintaining access to digital and other electronic items. An audit of audio-visual material was carried out in 2015, and as a consequence a digital project group was formed with a remit to establish policies and procedures for the sustainable migration of AV and obsolete digital formats, the creation of appropriate metadata and the ongoing management of born-digital archives. Staff will work in conjunction with IT staff and the University’s Records Management service on digital preservation policies and procedures.

**Exhibitions & loans**

SC&A material is exhibited internally both as part of a regular programme of exhibitions in SC&A and by request in the University’s Museums and Galleries. It is exhibited externally both locally, such as by National Museums Liverpool, and nationally. International requests will also be considered.

The physical condition and preservation needs of items are considered when selecting material for display. Best practice display methods are followed, as set out in the Preservation Advisory Centre’s *Guidance for exhibiting archive and library materials* (2000), as far as possible. The duration of an exhibition, its security, the frequency with which individual items are displayed and the format and type of the material to be exhibited is always considered.

The loan of original material for exhibition must be approved by the Special Collections & Archives Manager and the Deputy Director, Libraries, Museums & Galleries. Loan for exhibition will normally only be approved if compliance with the standards of care set out in the **Exhibition loan conditions** can be satisfied and the **application form** is completed.
Extended loan periods will be considered, but will be subject to review. Alternative items may be suggested for longer term exhibitions.

It may be appropriate for SC&A staff to accompany materials in transit to the borrowing institution for insurance purposes.

**Surrogates**

Surrogates will be used where possible whenever an item is considered unsuitable for display, teaching use or research. Priorities for digitisation of collections are based on access requirements and physical condition.

**Housekeeping**

SC&A staff understand importance of maintaining cleanliness in all SC&A storage areas and other spaces where the collections are consulted. Staff monitor the spaces, keep areas tidy and re-shelve items when not in use. A regular time is scheduled each week for housekeeping activities.

Library assistants take part in a regular maintenance programme of cleaning material using a soft brush or Museum Vac, as appropriate, under the supervision of professionally qualified staff.

**Handling & Packaging**

Procedures for processing, consulting and copying material are designed to minimise handling.

One of SC&A’s ongoing collection management activities is a programme of re-packaging to ensure that materials are housed in acid-free boxes, folders, envelopes and melinex sleeves, as appropriate.

**Conservation**

A small internal budget exists for conservation work, which is carried out externally by an accredited conservator. Items are considered for conservation based on:

- Demand for access (either demonstrated or projected), particularly use in University teaching
- Degree of current damage
- Potential deterioration
- Historical significance
- Institutional significance

Conservation requirements are considered as part of the cataloguing process, and when producing materials for reading room use, teaching and exhibitions. A full conservation survey of the collections using recognised benchmarks is factored into future plans.

**Disaster recovery and continuity**

The University Library maintains a Disaster Control Plan, which is updated annually by the Library’s Head of Planning and Resources. The SC&A Manager is the University Library’s Disaster Reaction Officer.
The Library has a contract with Harwell Drying and Restoration Services. A disaster kit is available in the SC&A store area and is monitored on a regular basis and supplies replaced as required.

**Monitoring and review of policy**

This policy was approved in June 2017 and will be reviewed annually. Revisions will be approved by the Library Leadership Team and the University’s Heritage, Arts and Culture Committee, as appropriate.

Last reviewed: February 2018