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1. **Scope and Definitions**

1.1 **Scope**

This policy provides a high-level explanation of what kinds of collections information we have, and why and when we gather, create, hold and maintain this information in the ways that we do. It forms one element of our collections management framework, highlighting and reinforcing the inter-relationship between collections development, collections information and collections care. The Collections Information Policy is supported by a collections information plan to guide consistent planning and improved decision making, and cataloguing procedures for the various parts of the collections.

The policy is an acknowledgement that collections information is critical not only to good collections management but, importantly, must evolve and improve continuously to support Wellcome Collection’s vision to be a place that challenges the way we think and feel about health by connecting science, medicine, life and art. We aim to be recognised as a world-leading museum and library that provides unique inspiration and rewards for our visitors and is a cultural ambassador for Wellcome.

Wellcome believes that good health makes life better, and its aim as a foundation is to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive. Four principles: “we make it count”, “we act boldly”, “we stretch ourselves” and “we pull together”, guide our work towards this aim.

Collections information is defined very broadly in this policy as information that Wellcome Collection collects, creates, holds and maintains, and which can be related to items in our collections. Collections information ranges from a minimal inventory record through to professionally curated descriptive, bibliographic and collections management metadata. It encompasses information about content and context, such as provenance; information about format and physical condition; information about ownership, rights and access conditions; and information associated with our management of the item. But it can also include broader contextual knowledge, including editorial interpretations, stories, research and recorded conversation, where such information is collected and structured to facilitate connections and contextual links to be made between collections items.

We collect, create, hold and maintain information about the collections, physical and digital, for which we are legally responsible, as well as providing access to that information for researchers and visitors. Collections information itself may be either analogue or digital in form. We define the collections for which we are legally responsible according to the description published in our Collections Development Policy, including both core and support collections. This definition applies regardless of whether items are currently open for use, open with advisory, restricted or closed according to the terms of our Access Policy and procedures on research access.

This policy sets out the principles by which Wellcome Collection takes responsibility for maintaining a minimum level of collections information management and access, in line with Wellcome Collection’s vision, goals and objectives, and in proportion to resources available.

This Collections Information Policy does not apply to contemporary documentation maintained by the Science Museum relating to items in Sir Henry Wellcome’s Museum Collection, which has been on long-term loan to the Science Museum since the mid-1970s. But this policy does cover archive documentation relating to those same items as part of the collections of the former Wellcome Historical Medical Museum.
1.2 Definitions of terms used in this policy

This policy uses the neutral language of PAS197, the Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management, to describe how we process our combined museum, archive and library collections.

**Accessioning**: the process of recording the admission of an item or group of items into the Core Collections.

**Acquisition**: the process of obtaining responsibility for an item, or group of items. This Collections Information Policy applies to all items acquired for our collections, regardless of whether legal title has also been transferred to Wellcome.

**API**: Application Program Interface. A clearly defined set of rules or protocols (e.g. HTTP) and methods of communication (e.g. JSON) to enable interaction between different software components. APIs allow for the modular development of software and services by Wellcome and third-party developers.

**Appraisal**: the process of deciding whether an item, or group of items, has continuing, long-term value in accordance with Wellcome Collection’s vision and Collections Development Policy.

**Cataloguing**: the professionally coordinated construction of a structured list of information about or relating to items, or groups of items, within the collections.

**CMS**: collections management system. Wellcome’s collections management infrastructure currently combines five enterprise software systems: Calm, MIMSY XG (both supplied by Axiell Group AB), Preservica (Preservica Ltd.), Goobi (intranda GmbH) and Sierra (Innovative Interfaces, Inc.). A Wellcome Collection systems roadmap is under development to ensure that our collections management infrastructure is fit for purpose and that collections information is appropriately safeguarded for the future. Public access to information from these systems is also provided via an open-source platform developed internally.

**Inventory**: the minimal viable record needed to identify and locate items, or groups of items, within the collections. This basic level of collections information is as defined in the Spectrum 5.0 collection management standard.
2. Principles

We want to maximise access and use of our collections, whilst also ensuring their security and long-term preservation. We know that access and use is impossible without good quality collections information, which lets people know what we have and how it can be accessed.

The range and size of our collections makes the collection and creation of collections information a wide-reaching task. We have adopted five principles which help guide our collections information work:

2.1 Open and accessible

- We strive to provide clear, up-to-date and relevant collections information to maximise access to our collections, whilst also ensuring that we behave lawfully, ethically and responsibly (see Appendix and our Access Policy for further details).
- We share our collections information and resources wherever possible, through open licensing and the development of an open platform to provide access to information about our collections.
- We aim to be transparent about the origins of our collections information – what we collect and what we create – and clear about the decisions we take on the basis of this information.

2.2 Diverse and inclusive

- We seek to expand the variety and diversity of voices represented in the information we make available about our collections.
- We strive to make our collections information respectful and accessible, whilst valuing and celebrating the different historical, social and cultural contexts that our collections embody and express.
- We promote interdisciplinary collaboration and value working with others to minimise duplication of effort and to provide challenge to established professional perspectives.

2.3 Consistent and coherent

- We develop common frameworks for prioritising cataloguing and other work which results in the creation of new collections information, and make decisions based on a holistic view across our collections.
- We strive for efficiency in all our collections information activities: to link information rather than replicate, to re-purpose good quality supplier or legacy information rather than creating it anew, and progressively to enrich collections information from the foundation of a minimal viable inventory record.
- We aim to use language which is consistent and coherent across all our collections, to improve the comprehension and usability of our collections information.

2.4 Agile and iterative

- We seek to continuously improve the information we hold about our collections, recognising that the uses and purposes that good quality collections information supports are constantly evolving.
- We recognise that the extraordinary diversity of collections in our care requires us to be flexible and adaptable in the collections information that we collect and create.
2.5 Understanding our audiences

- We keep the researcher and visitor in mind whenever we collect or create collections information, thinking about how it may help them access and understand the material in our collections.
- We aim to inspire curiosity, catalyse conversations and to open up dialogue and debate around collections information with the widest audience.
3. Why do we need good collections information?

Information about the collections is key to achieving our vision and strategic goals, and our ambition to be recognised as a world-leading museum and library.

We are committed to collecting, creating and maintaining high quality collections information in order to:

3.1 Improve access to the collections

- Collections information enables researchers and visitors to find and access items from our collections, and to understand them in their historical and institutional context; for example, to research their provenance, associated people and events.
- Wellcome Collection staff use collections information to develop exhibitions and other interpretative materials, in order to engage with our visitors and research audiences. Better collections information will enable us to share our collections more widely and with different audiences.
- Collections information forms the backbone of our developing digital collection platform, which aims to provide the foundation for future innovations in search and discovery, and to facilitate creative uses, of the collections.

3.2 Enhance accountability

- Collections information enables accountability for items for which we are legally responsible, including both Core and Support Collections.
- Wellcome Collection staff use, and create, collections information in managing and monitoring the development and use of the collections according to appropriate sectoral procedures and standards (see Appendix and our Collections Information Plan for details).
- For items held on approval, and loans, both long and short term, we follow appropriate sectoral procedures (see Appendix) and maintain at least inventory level collections information, in order to provide the same reasonable care and security to such items as we would our own collections.

3.3 Strengthen security

- Collections information is vital to ensure that the location and movement of items is controlled and tracked, and to provide security against loss or theft of collections items.
4. Collections information at Wellcome

We view the collection and creation of collections information as an iterative process, building up from a core inventory (minimal viable) record for each item, or collection of items.

4.1 Documenting new acquisitions

We capture at least inventory level details for all items newly entering our care, through our object entry, acquisition and accession procedures. The point of acquisition is also an opportunity to supplement this basic level of collections information. We work closely with our donors and suppliers to allow them to contribute collections information that will enrich the information we hold about our collections, and to create efficient processing workflows.

4.2 Cataloguing

Through cataloguing and associated research, we transform collections information into structured data which can then be made available online through our website and APIs. New catalogue records input into our CMS must meet appropriate sectoral minimum standards (see Appendix), in order to facilitate interoperability and data sharing. We recognise that these standards and our cataloguing practices will continue to evolve in line with user needs and developments in information technology. We view cataloguing as a process of continuous change, and recognise that our collections information can always be improved and enriched.

4.3 Legacy collections information

Legacy collections information is held across a wide range of hard copy and electronic formats, including details marked directly onto collections items.

As a security measure and to facilitate access to provenance information about our collections, we have digitised historic collections management records, including accessions and registration records for our Core Collections. These records are available online as part of the archives of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and Library:
https://search.wellcomelibrary.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb1977274.

4.4 Inventory and Backlog Management

Details of gaps and backlogs of collections information for Core Collections are documented in our collections information plan, which sets out how we will identify, prioritise and address inventory and cataloguing backlogs, as resources permit.
4.5 Collections Information Security

Robust mechanisms are in place to ensure the security and sustainability of our collections information and digital collections assets. Our collections management systems, born digital assets and network infrastructure are protected in accordance with the National Cyber Security Centre’s 10 Steps to Cyber Security. All onsite data storage is backed up daily, de-duplicated and stored both onsite and off-site at our disaster recovery site in Cambridge. Digitised surrogates (including our digitised historic collections management records) are hosted at Amazon’s AWS data centres. Amazon S3 and Amazon Glacier automatically replicate data across multiple data centres and are designed to deliver 99.999999999% durability. We plan to migrate born digital assets to AWS during the next five years.
Appendix – Legal, Ethical and Standards Framework

Wellcome Collection’s Collections Information Policy is informed by legislation, ethical codes and appropriate national and international sectoral standards, including:

Legislation

- Public Records Act, 1958, as amended, s.3(6).
- Charities Act, 2006 and predecessors.
- Companies Act, 2006 and predecessors.

Ethical codes


Sectoral standards

- Spectrum 5.0: UK Museum Collections Management Standard.
- Resource Description and Access (RDA), 2010, as revised (http://access.rdatoolkit.org/).
- DCRM (B): Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books), 3rd printing with corrections (November 2011), Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association.
- DCRM (G): Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics), 2008, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association.
- MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) Subject headings (https://meshb.nlm.nih.gov/search).
• Library of Congress Classification (https://classificationweb.net/).
• IIIF Image API (http://iiif.io/api/image/2.1).
• IIIF Presentation API (http://iiif.io/api/presentation/2.1).
• ALTO Technical Metadata for Layout and Text Objects (https://www.loc.gov/standards/alto/).
• Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/).
• JSON-LD (https://www.w3.org/TR/json-ld/).
• OpenAPI Initiative (https://www.openapis.org).
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