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1. Introduction and statement of purpose

How we conserve and care for our collections is central to helping Wellcome Collection achieve its core aims and objectives.

Wellcome Collection’s vision is 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.

Our collections are comprised of Core and Support Collections.

1.1 Introduction to our Core Collections

We are committed to the ongoing development of our Core Collections, and their long-term retention, care and access in accordance with museum, archive and library best practice. They comprise:

- **Visual and material culture** – 117,000 historic items, an estimated 250,000 prints, paintings, drawings and photographs, and a small number of other artistic objects.
- **Printed and published rare materials** – includes our significant holdings of rare and early printed books, ephemera and pamphlets. In addition to around 70,000 monographs (including over 600 pre-1501 books, and over 5,000 16th-century books), there are 700 items of ephemera and more than 900 pamphlets.
- **Archives and manuscripts** – includes unpublished material, drafts, notes, letters and photographs in both analogue and born-digital formats, including over 3,000 moving image and sound recordings. There are over 800 collections of personal papers, organisational archives, image and audio-visual collections and around 21,000 manuscripts in over 50 different languages, dating from antiquity to the present day.

1.2 Introduction to our Support Collections

The Support Collections are more adaptable, and as a result content may change frequently. Items are not necessarily subject to the same levels of collections management, care and conservation as our Core Collections. They comprise:

- **Auxiliary material** (which has been acquired to enhance display within exhibitions).
- **Reserve collection** (items of a higher value and greater historical or artistic significance than those in the auxiliary collection).
- **Printed and published reference collection** (including approximately 15,000 journal titles, 300,000 books, pamphlets and items of ephemera and 5,000 moving image and sound recordings).
- **Digital reference collection** (contains digitised content from external organisations).

1 The definition of item is taken from PAS197 and PAS198: “item” is a single article or unit in a collection. For example, an artefact, book, digital and physical document (including a record) journal, specimen or work of art.
We strive to ensure that the items are stored in a safe, secure and sustainable way in line with best practice and displayed without compromising their physical, historical and structural integrity.

Some damage will occur to our collections due to natural deterioration processes; but we are committed to reducing this to as low a level as is reasonably practicable through a holistic combination of remedial conservation, storage improvements and high standards of collections management. This strategy is however balanced with a pragmatic, risk based approach in which our team evaluates and supports the active use of the collections. They identify and where possible mitigate any negative impact of all activities in the context of evidence, collaboration and resource. Their experience can be used to add value and enrich the experience.

Housekeeping, building maintenance and security are conducted by contracted external teams so the link and relationship with Conservation and Collections Care is strengthened with regular contact, standard operating procedures, access to the Building Management System (BMS) training and updates. We meet to discuss regular inspections, any risks that have been identified, access and cover for planned maintenance programmes.

1.3 Responsibility for Conservation and Collections Care

We recognise our responsibility when conserving and caring for the Core Collections: to ensure that care, documentation, storage, location control and use will adhere to appropriate national and international guidelines, accreditation standards and codes of ethics.

Overall responsibility for the care of the collection is held by Wellcome Trust's Board of Governors. Responsibility for approving policies has been delegated to the Wellcome Collection Leadership Team, through the Executive Leadership Team, Funding and Direct Activities committee. In accordance with Wellcome’s formal scheme of delegation, responsibility for setting the Conservation and Collections Care departments direction of travel, policy and procedures pertaining to core collections is delegated to the Conservation and Collections Care Manager who oversees the work of the Conservation and Collections Care Team.

Our collections are cared for by the Conservation and Collections Care team who use their judgement, experience, analysis and consultation with colleagues to consider the appropriate levels of conservation needed and the best storage for all items. Our work within larger interdisciplinary teams ensures we do not work in a silo.

1.4 Statement of purpose

The purpose of this policy is to articulate our stewardship of the collections, our approach to balancing preservation of and access to the collections with long-term planning aspirations.

It defines the activities undertaken by the team, the standards of care within legal frameworks and the team’s recognised qualifications. This policy should be read alongside the Conservation and Collections Care Plan, the Forward Plan and other procedural documents. These all provide detail, specifications and our longer-term ambitions for the coming years.
The benefits of a clear policy include:

- Providing the team with knowledge of what is expected of them.
- Reinforcing accountability.
- Supporting prioritisation when allocating resources.
- Allowing the development of “Consistent and Coherent” collection care programmes.
- Aiming for “Open and Accessible” transparency with reasoned challenges.
- Supports “Agile and Iterative” decision making about collection items.

2 The terms “Consistent and Coherent”; “Open and Accessible” and “Agile and Iterative” are all referenced in the Collections Information Policy.
2. Introduction to Conservation and Collection Care activities

Conservation is a profession devoted to the preservation of cultural heritage for the future. Our Conservation and Collections Care team are trained professionals who combine scientific skills with knowledge of art and social history, design, changing fashions and legislation to understand the context of the objects they work with, and to care for and conserve them sensitively and appropriately.

Wellcome Collection’s Conservation and Collections Care team undertake the following activities:

2.1 Preventive conservation

Preventive conservation requirements seek to balance, as far as possible, access and use of the collection with the need to preserve collection items. The aim of preventive conservation is to minimise deterioration and prevent damage by managing risks wherever they are stored, handled or displayed. It is the most effective means of preservation by maintaining, and where possible enhancing the condition of an object or producing a facsimile to protect the original.

We provide suitable and stable environmental conditions for the collections, in the galleries, in the stores and in transit. The team monitor and control the environment (temperature, light, relative humidity, pests, pollutants, vibration, chemical and biological agents) appropriate to the materials and use collated data to recommend improvements.

Housekeeping regimes include the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme. Regular and annual deep cleaning, identifying and zoning sensitive materials and training for wider teams are all key components to its success.

We work to embed sustainability across conservation and collection care practices in accordance with Wellcome’s policy.

2.2 Remedial conservation

The practical treatment of collection items varies from the smallest tear repair, consolidating flaking pigments to (on occasion) the re-sewing and re-binding of severely damaged books. However, the principle of “minimal intervention” is the one that guides the Conservation and Collections Care team’s approach.

The treatment of items required for public and research access or where condition requires urgent action to prevent loss or risk to other items, will be prioritised.

Remedial conservation work is carried out by or under the supervision of a conservator. Treatment is carried out to stabilise the physical and chemical deterioration of materials so that they can be used for display, research, events and digitisation. This includes examination, cleaning, preparation, stabilisation, consolidation, repair, rehousing and documentation of processes and materials into our Collections Management System (CMS).

Materials and methods used in the treatments are stable, tested materials that must comply with current H&S legislation for their management. They are used to improve long-term preservation rather than restoration.
All conservation activity is managed through the Conservation Work Request system accessed through SharePoint by all stakeholders. If damage is identified it is recorded on the spreadsheet and then assessed by priority.

### 2.3 Collections condition overview

These are the range of activities intended to safeguard a collection, and include organisational policies, security, condition surveys, cleaning and maintenance regimes.

Condition, hazard and storage assessments of the existing collection are prepared to inform and monitor storage management. Areas for priority are identified and projects to improve are fed into the workplans and objectives. New acquisitions and disposal candidates are discussed, site visits undertaken and potential impacts flagged.

Monitoring of the collection is carried out systematically via quarterly Integrated Pest Management (IPM) checks and annual condition surveys of items in the galleries on public display, and sensitive materials within the stores. Patterns and higher than base-level populations are identified for investigation, treatment and improvement as appropriate.

### 2.4 Benchmarking and stores management

We store and display the collection in managed environments that minimise their rates of deterioration. Inert materials, air handling, dedicated quarantine area, sealed rooms and window films are just some of the controls in place.

A benchmark is an agreed level of performance by which something can be measured and this will be used within Wellcome Collection from 2018 onwards to inform future storage strategies and to determine which collections are stored on and off site.

There are currently 23,499 linear metres of onsite storage at Wellcome Collection within ten rooms in London which are monitored and controlled by our Facilities team and Conservation and Collections Care team. Three dimensional collections including painting and gilded frames are currently stored within roller racking onsite.

We have off-site storage of paper-based materials underground within DeepStore, Cheshire. Some of our Support Collection is also housed at Wellcome’s Waxlow Road off-site store. The Conservation and Collections Care team manage all requests for material by staff and Library users, coordinate its safe transportation and monitor their environment remotely. The nature of the storage is very stable but environmental readings are sent to the team for comment monthly or if anything changes.

### 2.5 Research

Scientific, technical examination and analysis are used to identify, maintain and improve the preservation and treatment of the collections. The Conservation and Collections Care team undertake research into treatment methods and materials as required by object type. Examination and destructive sampling will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Each year the Conservation and Collections Care team partner with university conservation departments to host placements within the studio. This collaboration allows us to keep up with research into new methods and materials that could preserve or affect our collections. All research results are made available both internally and externally to the conservation profession.

Collection items can be requested in the viewing rooms by visiting researchers and our internal teams. The Conservation and Collections Care team work closely with the Library Experience and
Engagement Teams to assess sensitive items prior to the visit, prioritise conservation works and ensure good handling is carried out under the supervision of others.

2.6 Business continuity and disaster response

Planning and preparing the response to incidents large and small which might threaten the collections is an important part of the work of the Conservation and Collections Care team. We feed into the larger Business Continuity Plan for Wellcome Trust, manage the Library and Storage disaster recovery plan and coordinate training.

Planning and preparing the response to any incident which might threaten the collection is an important part of the work of the Conservation and Collections Care team. We feed into the larger Business Continuity Plan for Wellcome Trust and manage the Library and Storage disaster recovery plan, working closely with and alongside other Wellcome staff to ensure a consistency for the collection.

The Conservation and Collections Care team work with Facilities to ensure the disaster cabinets, trolleys and spill bins throughout the building are tamper proof, fully stocked and accessible.

Conservation and Collections Care work closely with Public Programmes to ensure the “rescue” contracts with Harwell, etc. are appropriate and that regular training is provided for all members of staff on the cascade call-out lists to build up confidence levels while working in a pressured situation.

2.7 Training in object handling and collections care

The Conservation and Collections Care team are trained to the required standards with many attaining their Icon Accreditation qualification. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an integral part of the annual Performance and Development Review (PDR) ensuring the skills base is appropriate, developing and up-to-date to care for the collections.

The team are involved in the induction process for new starters and provide tailor made training in object handling, hazard and condition surveys, object awareness and triage to appropriate teams who work with the collection regularly and those involved in one-off events.

2.8 Managing external contractors

In areas where there are less in-house conservation or technical skills (for example photographs, textiles, historic frames, oil paintings or to prepare and frame works), we use external conservators or technicians with suitable experience, qualifications and appropriate recommendations.

A conservator or conservation practice that is contracted to provide advice or services are included in the Conservation Register operated by Icon and where available a professionally accredited conservator is used.

All workforce members and freelance staff working to support the care and conservation of the collection must be aware and follow all policies and procedures.

These activities are recorded within the Conservation and Collections Care Plan “Plans for Improvement” and Forward Plan with SMART timelines.
3. Legal framework and standards of care

3.1 Legal framework

Legal frameworks and standards are a vital element in developing reliable Conservation and Collections Care procedures. The work of the Conservation and Collections Care team is bound by The Code of Conduct and Professional standards (2015) from the Institute of Conservation (Icon). It complies with relevant standards and maintains a watching brief as new standards emerge. These are all underpinned by the ethical and sensitive awareness inherent with working with such a diverse collection.

3.2 Standards of care

This policy is guided by current legal and ethical requirements and standards, which include:

- National Heritage Act, 1983.
- Museum and conservation ethical policies and guidelines: Museums Association Code of Ethics.
- Wellcome Collection complies with its own Health, Safety and Environment Policy and all relevant health and safety legislation, including, but not limited to, the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health, 2002.
- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage, 2018: detailing the specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections.
- The display and storage of the library and object collections is guided by PAS 198:2012 Specification for Managing Environmental Conditions for Cultural Collections.
- Any sources of radiation and contaminated material will comply with Wellcome Trust’s local rules. All such work will be supervised by the Radiation Protection Supervisor (RPS) and supported by the Radiation Protection Officers (RPO).
4. **Staffing, personal development and knowledge sharing**

4.1 **Staffing**

Wellcome Collection is committed to develop the talent, skills and expertise of its staff to improve standards, efficiency and effectiveness in the care of its collections. It ensures that:

- There is a qualified, experienced and content Conservation and Collections Care team to work with and care for the collection.
- Only trained staff carry out conservation work following agreed and published procedures.
- The Conservation and Collections Care Manager leads the department and has overall authority and responsibility for setting the policy, procedures, plans and ensuring standards. Their team collaborate with other departments but the manager will prioritise the direction and ensure sustainable delivery plans.
- The Conservators are responsible for planning and carrying out the work on the collections, sitting within and advising project teams and for training staff in collections care and disaster recovery as appropriate. They maintain and enhance the Stewardship functions including enabling meaningful access to material. They have responsibility to lead, advise, co-ordinate and monitor health and safety procedures and practices in their work area.
- The Storage and Preservation Coordinator is responsible for the physical care of the stored collections and facilitating access to them; they assist with preventive conservation programmes including environmental monitoring, IPM programmes, security and housekeeping regimes with our external teams. They provide training in collections care and disaster preparedness.

4.2 **Personal development**

We are committed to ensuring that:

- The skills of all staff that work with the collections are developed through annual PDR and CPD training by attending workshops, conferences or shadowing colleagues.
- New staff, volunteers, students and interns receive training and supervision in collection care and object handling appropriate to their role.

It is the responsibility of all staff to follow collections care guidelines and procedures when working with the collections.

4.3 **Knowledge sharing and support across Wellcome Collection**

The Conservation and Collections Care team provide specialist advice and training to support an array of activities. Their work sits alongside the Collections Development and Collections Information Policies and Plans collaborating within Wellcome Collection to:

- Loan items to other institutions for inclusion in exhibition.
- Loans of objects from other institutions, companies and individuals into Wellcome Collection.
- Design, construction, clearance and installation of exhibitions and displays.
- Design, construction and preparation of storage areas for collections.
- Coordinating and requesting items from offsite storage.
- Public events using the collection held within Wellcome Trust spaces.
• Digitisation or replication of items for handling or exhibition reasons.
• Support research activity using collection items by providing a safe viewing environment of our rare collections through the Rare Materials Room and advising on appropriate analysis.

Wellcome Collection aims to involve and consult with the Conservation and Collections Care team at the earliest opportunity for all collections based activity as the added value can enrich the decision and selection process. This enables active collaboration, sharing of experiences, support and the appropriate allocation of budget and staff resources.

5. Longer term objectives

Conservation and Collections Care will continue to apply the most up-to-date international standards to conserve and care for the collections. It strives to challenge, assess and review current working practices to ensure they’re fit for purpose and chime with the current vision within the field and within Wellcome.

We will:

• Continue to raise standards in the conservation, storage, use and display of collections.
• Strive to provide “open and accessible” storage and location controls.
• Review current on- and off-site storage provision.
• Develop the collections through acquisition and disposal as per the Collections Development Policy.
• Support the inventory and cataloguing backlog as referenced in the Collections Information Policy.
• Explore how similar institutions balance risk to the collection against the benefits to our audiences to continue to support and enrich the Access Policy.
• Transfer historical conservation treatment records to the Collections Management System (CMS) and use this more widely to create bespoke reports.
• Review the current security measures and access to the stores.
• Collaborate with colleagues to raise the profile of Conservation and Collections Care.

6. Monitoring and review

This document is to be read in conjunction with:

• Conservation and Collections Care Plan, Forward Plan and Procedures.
• Collections Development Policy, Collection Information Policy and Access Policy.
• Collection Management Framework.
• Wellcome Trust Health, Safety and Environment Policy.
• Wellcome Trust Business Continuity Plans incorporating Disaster Recovery Plans.

This document is available on SharePoint, where it will be reviewed every three years to ensure it:

• Addresses current internal strategic developments.
• Meets the needs of the collections it serves.
• Reflects changes in the standards and legislation.
• Supports the wider team responsible for collections development.
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<tr>
<td><strong>Written by</strong></td>
<td>Emma Duggan</td>
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<td>Conservation &amp; Collections Care</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
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<td><strong>Policy owner</strong></td>
<td>Donne Robertson</td>
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