

FACTSHEET 6: CARE OF COLLECTIONS SITUATION REVIEW

**THIS FACTSHEET RELATES TO QUESTION 3.21 OF THE MSPI
(MUSEUM STANDARDS PROGRAMME FOR IRELAND)**

One of the central issues when caring for a collection is that no further damage is caused to the objects. Collections need to be provided with a sympathetic environment so that incipient problems are not aggravated. Proper storage will retard deterioration and correct handling techniques will prevent further damage.

Please refer to *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation* by Susan Corr, published by the Heritage Council (2000).

You do not need to submit this completed checklist as part of the accreditation application, it should be used as a guide for carrying out a situation review and relevant areas needing review should be added as required to fit your institution.

1. Structural Condition of the Building - Exterior

The building is the initial layer in a series of protective structures around the collection. The fabric of the building is the primary barrier against the exterior climate and must be properly maintained in order to regulate the interior climatic conditions (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 15-19).

Regularly check the outside of the building and form a strategy to combat problems as they arise. Use this section to detail any on-going maintenance issues you have and list timeframe for any identified repairs needed.

Checklist - Exterior	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Roof				
Guttering/drains				
Pointing				
Chimneys				
Doors/windows				
Decorative order				

2. Structural Condition of the Building - Interior

The fabric of a building warms and cools in response to weather conditions and direct sunlight. How quickly this affects the interior climate is a measure of the insulating properties of the building. This may need to be addressed at a fundamental level but there is much that can be done from a good housekeeping point of view to improve the thermal retaining properties of a building (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 19-20).

Regularly check the interior of the building and form a strategy to combat problems as they arise. Use this section to detail any on-going maintenance issues you have and list timeframe for any identified repairs needed.

Checklist - Interior	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Insulation				
Draught-proofing				
Decorative order				
Use of safe materials (non-off gassing)				
Preventative maintenance schedule				

3. Environmental Conditions

Light, heat, humidity, and air-borne pollutants are the main elements that determine environmental conditions within a building. It is recognised that continuous fluctuations, particularly of heat and humidity, are more damaging than conditions that fall outside the recommended parameters but remain constant (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 19-29).

Regularly check the environmental conditions within the building and form a strategy to combat problems as they arise. Use this section to detail any on-going issues in environmental conditions in your building; where relevant highlight any potentially problematic variations in conditions and any identified actions required.

Checklist - Environmental Conditions	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Light				
Heat/cold				
Humidity				
Air pollutants, dust and dirt				
Insect activity				

4. Environmental Monitoring

Monitoring means keeping a regular eye on the building and its contents - from a simple visual routine to the use of instruments that record and measure environmental factors like the amount of light in a room or the level of moisture in the atmosphere.

Regular monitoring develops a picture of what is happening to a collection over time (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, p 47). Outline policy of monitoring the environment: who is responsible for analysing readings and how the results are responded to?

Checklist - Environmental Monitoring	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Regularity of monitoring				
Interpretation of results				
Response plan				
Availability of instrumentation				
Maintenance and calibration of instrumentation				

5. Objects

An inventory of the collection must be compiled as a matter of course and every object assigned a unique inventory or Object ID. This number should be attached to every document relating to the object; from condition reports to correspondence (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 44-46).

Outline current policy; use this section to detail any on-going issues you have identified and actions required.

Checklist - Objects	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Object documentation, ID				
Photographic record				
Condition statement				

6. Handling and Access

Physical damage occurs most frequently during handling and access of material. Objects need to be handled with respect and care and should be correctly supported at all times (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 50-52). Outline current policies and detail any on-going issues you have identified and actions required.

Checklist - Handling and Access	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Awareness of correct handling procedures				
Availability of protective wear, gloves, supports, etc				
Instruction notice to public of preservation measures				
Staff training and instruction				

7. Storage

The storage of objects ultimately guarantees their preservation. Inappropriate storage causes damage and, given that only a small percentage of a collection is usually on display, this damage can extend to most of the collection (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 52-53). Insert summary of storage conditions; use this section to detail any on-going issues you have identified and actions required.

Checklist - Storage	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Suitability of storage space				
Suitability of storage system (racks, drawers, shelves)				
Appropriate organisation of objects				
Environmental conditions in store:				
1. Light				
2. Temperature				
3. Humidity				
4. Pollutants				

8. Exhibition

Objects on exhibition must be carefully displayed with due regard for the materials from which they are made. The better adapted the surrounds to meet the need of the objects, the less likely they are to be damaged by being displayed or exhibited (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 56-60). Insert summary of exhibition conditions; use this section to detail any on-going issues you have identified and actions required.

Checklist - Exhibition	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Suitability of exhibition space				
Suitability of supports & mounts for exhibition				
Environmental conditions in the exhibition space:				
1. Light				
2. Temperature				
3. Humidity				
4. Pollutants				
Level of environmental control offered by cases				
Security				

9. Disaster Planning

Despite the best of intentions things can go wrong on a disastrous scale and the collections may need to be evacuated. The risk of further damage after the event can be significantly reduced if people are prepared and have a number of agreed procedures (see: *Caring for Collections: A Manual of Preventive Conservation*, pp 61-62). Insert details of disaster plan; use this section to detail any on-going issues you have identified and actions required. See also *Guidelines/Appendix on Writing a Disaster Response Plan*.

Checklist - Disaster Planning	Good/Adequate/ Poor/ Unacceptable	Strategy	Timescale	Cost
Protocol for contacting keyholders				
Contact with emergency services				
The formation of a disaster team, including conservators				
Prioritisation of the artefacts				
Alarm systems, maintenance & evacuation drills				
Provision of a disaster bin				
Alternative accommodation for the collection				

Other useful tools when carrying out a situation review:

There are some excellent guides produced by the Department of the Environment on how to Care for Historic Buildings. They include some very useful checklists and can be downloaded for free from: www.ahg.gov.ie/en/Publications/HeritagePublications/BuiltHeritagePolicyPublications/

If you haven't already completed a **Facility Report** for your institution it is worth doing so now; it lists the general requirements considered when your organisation requests to borrow an object on loan for exhibition. The Facilities Report devised by the United Kingdom Registrars Group in consultation with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is available free to download at: www.ukregistrarsgroup.org/publications. Alternatively the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museum's facility report from the United States is available free to download at: www.rcaam.org/

The UK's Collections Trust Benchmarks for Collection Care checklist runs to 56 pages of questions, it is extremely thorough and is a very useful prompt when carrying out your own situation review. Available to download free at: www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes.