



University of
St Andrews

Collections Research Policy: University Collections and Museums

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Purpose	The Collections Research Policy: University Collections and Museums has been prepared to facilitate research access to the historical objects, specimens, rare books, archives and other resources held in University Collections and Museums at the University of St Andrews.

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- This document and forms associated with this document are available in an alternative format upon request.

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1. Statement

- 1.1 The Collections Research Policy: University Collections and Museums has been prepared to facilitate research access to the historical objects, specimens, rare books, archives and other resources held in University Collections and Museums at the University of St Andrews, hereafter referred to as University Collections.
- 1.2 This Policy Statement supersedes all previous and existing policies, formal or informal, relating to research projects with University Collections.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The Collections Research Policy applies to research projects that fall outwith standard research services offered by University Collections and Museums – the scope of which will be defined in this document.

3. Scope / jurisdiction

- 3.1 This policy applies to all potential researchers of material in University Collections. Researchers must read this policy and submit the associated protocol to University Collections ahead of beginning any research projects.
- 3.2 This policy statement applies to Research Projects that cannot be completed through our standard services - [consultation in the Napier Reading Room](#), [digitisation](#) and [enquiries](#).
- 3.3 This includes research that is based on:
- Culturally sensitive material, as determined in line with legal and ethical guidelines
 - Human remains
 - Material that has data protection considerations and/or is confidential
 - Destructive or harmful analysis
 - Larger scale research projects that require access to high volumes of material in a specific timeframe will need to be scoped, costed and scheduled in discussion with University Collections staff.
- 3.4 All requests to access University Collections should be made through the unicolls@st-andrews.ac.uk or through our [online booking form](#).
- 3.5 Libraries and Museums apply a unit-wide approach to Teaching and Research by members of staff, through a workload model. Exhibition

research by University Collections staff and partners is considered separately by the Programmes and Exhibitions Committee.

4. Roles and responsibilities

- 4.1 The Collections Research Policy and associated Collections Research Protocol (Appendix) will be managed by the Collections Working Group, Libraries and Museums. They will recommend whether to approve an application, reject it, or reject (with corrections).

5. Procedures

- 5.1 Issues to be considered before University Collections will agree to a research project request are:
- Support time needed from staff
 - Physical accessibility of the collections requested
 - Resources and/or facilities required for research
 - Security issues in relation to collections and their use
 - The condition of the material requested
 - The impact of destructive analysis on the requested material, in conjunction with the significance of information provided by the analysis.
- 5.2 Research Ethics
- 5.2.1 There are high levels of public trust in libraries and museums and in University research, and we must repay that trust by ensuring that research conducted with University Collections material adheres to ethical best practice.
- 5.2.2 The Collections Research Protocol (Appendix) must be submitted before carrying out any Research Project with material in University Collections.
- 5.2.3 Researchers at the University of St Andrews may also have to go through the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) process. More information can be found on the [UTREC webpages](#).
- 5.2.4 If you have ethics approval through another institution, we will ask to review this documentation and decide on whether to approve it. We may ask you for further information.

5.3 Culturally sensitive material

- 5.3.1 Some material may have culturally important protocols associated with them in relation to their handling or use. These might include supervision, restrictions on handling, or restrictions around photography. Research proposals must respect these protocols or research access may be refused.
- 5.3.2 In the case of a dispute or disagreement, or where University Collections considers that it has insufficient evidence or experience, external expert advice will be sought, including, where appropriate, from originating communities, rights holders, or relevant professional bodies.
- 5.3.3 These considerations are also given to human remains.

5.4 Human remains

- 5.4.1 In University Collections, 'human remains' is used to mean the bodies, and parts of bodies, of members of the species *Homo sapiens*. This includes osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bones and teeth), soft tissue including organs, skin, cornea, bone marrow, embryos, and slide preparations of human tissue, nails, and hair. It is acknowledged that some cultural communities give these a sacred importance.
- 5.4.2 Human remains may also include human tissue that may have been modified in some way. Bound-up material and funerary objects are items other than human remains which are connected to the remains in a way that means they are considered inextricably linked.
- 5.4.3 Historic human remains (over 100 years old) are a valuable source of information regarding past populations and their culture and practices, a valuable tool in understanding human variation, evolution and development, and historic anatomical procedures. However, the nature of these collections and their acquisition requires a careful approach to prevent harm, or further harm, to the individuals represented within the collection, their communities, and their descendants.
- 5.4.4 There are six main responsibilities that museums in Scotland have in managing human remains, as highlighted in Guidelines for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museum Collections, which underpin all decisions relating to the care, research use, display and potential return or reburial of human remains in University Collections:
 - Rigour - Act with appropriate knowledge, skill, and care so that you can justify your decisions.
 - Honesty and integrity - Declare conflicts of interest and show transparency in sharing knowledge.

- Sensitivity - Show compassion and sensitivity for the feelings of other people and understanding different religious, spiritual, and cultural perspectives.
- Respect - Treat all people and communities with respect, ensuring that adverse impacts on them are minimised. Honour privacy and confidentiality.
- Openness and transparency - Listen, inform, and communicate openly and honestly.
- Fairness - Act fairly, give due weight to the interests of all parties and develop a consistent management process.

5.5 Material that has data protection considerations and/or is confidential

- 5.5.1 By default we apply standard closure periods to catalogued collections in line with data protection legislation. These will also be applied to uncatalogued collections where there is reason to believe that there are data protection concerns e.g. post-1920 collections.
- 5.5.2 We may consider providing access to closed collections on a case-by-case basis where ethical and legal concerns can be addressed via the Collections Research Protocol.

5.6 Destructive or potentially harmful methods of analysis

- 5.6.1 All research requiring physical samples to be taken, removal of parts from objects or exposure of material to potentially destructive or damaging agents or procedures (including gases, solvents, vacuums, X-rays, X-ray fluorescence, heaters, freezers, strong light, electromagnetic or particle radiation, physical agitation or scanners) must submit their rationale as part of the Collections Research Protocol (Appendix).
- 5.6.2 Where destructive research is approved, it is imperative that a binding commitment is made by the researcher or their institution that the results of the research – the data gathered and the resulting analysis/publication - are made available to University Collections. A failure to provide this undertaking will mean that permission for the research will be withdrawn.
- 5.6.3 The information supplied by the researcher will be recorded on the associated Collections record. This may remove the need to repeat the research in future and may negate requests to do so.
- 5.6.4 Regarding repeat sampling of the same object or collection, consideration should be given to denying the request if it is felt that this will result in the object or collection being over-sampled or if

appropriate data already exists to support the research enquiry or if the proposed method will not add substantially to existing data.

5.7 Larger scale research projects that require access to high volumes of material, or projects applying for or receiving grant funding

- 5.7.1 Larger scale research projects that require access to high volumes of material from University Collections in a specific timeframe will need to be scoped, costed and scheduled in discussion with University Collections staff.
- 5.7.2 For projects of this nature, as well as for any projects applying for or in receipt of grant funding, there may be direct costs to be charged to a grant. These should be discussed with University Collections staff as early as possible and certainly before a funding application is submitted.

6. Sanctions

- 6.1 Any research projects that are approved in line with this policy and related guidelines that are found to be in violation of agreed protocols will be paused or terminated immediately (depending on the severity of the issue or infringement) pending investigation and/or review by University Collections staff.
- 6.2 Findings of reviews will be presented to the Collections Working Group for recommendation and discussion of any actions to be taken. These may be escalated (depending on the severity of the issue or infringement) to the Assistant Director, University Collections and Museums, or Director of Libraries and Museums.

7. Related documents and regulatory framework

- 7.1 The following documents should be specifically consulted when developing research projects that involve the use of historic human remains and other anatomical objects and specimens. They contain information on the ethical treatment of remains.
 - University of St Andrews – Care of non-contemporary human remains – Code of Conduct and Protocol.
 - British Association of Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABAO) Code of Ethics; Code of Practice; Guidance Document on Imaging.

7.2 An [Equality Impact Assessment](#) has been conducted on this policy.

8. Contacts

8.1 Policy users should direct questions about this policy to the Head of Museum and Photographic Collections and/or Head of Archives and Rare Books. Contact should be made through unicolls@st-andrews.ac.uk.

9. Version control

Version number	Purpose or changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and School or unit	Date
1	Policy creation		Eilidh Lawrence, Head of Museum and Photographic Collections, Libraries and Museums	17/4/26