
Conservation policy

UNRESTRICTED

This Policy was approved by the Standing Committee of the Board of Trustees on 24 January 2019 and will be reviewed not later than 2024.

This policy sets out the principles according to which the British Museum will conserve the objects in the collection.

Under the British Museum Act (1963), the Trustees of the British Museum are responsible to Parliament for the safekeeping and care of the collection and for making them available to the public.

The objects in the collection are preserved for the benefit of the public, present and future. The purpose of conservation is therefore to minimise the reduction of public benefit caused by deterioration or damage to the collection.

Therefore, to ensure that the collections are preserved, it is the policy of the Museum that¹:

1. While conservation treatment will be necessary to allow objects to be used, where possible, the collections are preserved by reducing the potential for deterioration and damage rather than through treatment and repair. That is, *preventive conservation* methods are applied in preference to *interventive conservation treatments*.

¹ This policy takes account of relevant standards and frameworks, such as Benchmarks in Collection Care and BSI PAS 198 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections.

Preventive conservation

2. Guidelines should be provided for the appropriate environmental conditions in which to store, handle display, study and transport the collections.
3. Measures are taken to prevent damage and minimise the risk of deterioration of objects wherever they are stored, handled, displayed, exhibited or loaned.
4. The risk of damage to the collections by pests is reduced by implementing and maintaining a comprehensive integrated pest management (IPM) programme across the entire Museum estate.
5. Systems are provided to monitor, and measures put in place to maintain and improve the state of the collections and the environments and spaces in which they are stored or displayed.
6. Collections which are inherently hazardous will be managed to reduce current and future health risks.
7. Preventive conservation requirements seek to balance, as far as possible, access and use of the collections with the need to preserve objects.

Conservation treatment

8. The state of conservation of all objects required for study, display, exhibition or loan is assessed and surveys of the collections in storage are conducted periodically, the frequency depending on the vulnerability of the materials they contain.
9. The treatment of objects required for public and scholarly access or whose condition requires urgent action to prevent loss, will be prioritised over conservation of objects that are stable but not required for immediate use.
10. Conservation treatments should be conducted by qualified conservators (or trainees under supervision) in accordance with international best practice and ethical guidelines.
11. All treatments carried out on the collection are documented fully and the resultant records are available and understandable.
12. Treatment methods use safe, stable, tested materials that, where possible, compromise neither future conservation treatment or scientific examination, nor the authenticity of the object.

Research

13. Scientific and technical examination, analysis and experimentation are used to maintain and improve the preservation and treatment of the collections and to increase information on materials and manufacture for display.

Sustainability

14. Conservation guidelines and measures are to be reconciled with the Museum's policy to minimise the unnecessary use of energy.

15. Materials are used that are not believed to pose a current or future health hazard and that can be re-used or disposed of in a sustainable manner.