

Documentation Policy

Archives & Collections

POLICY DETAILS:

Purpose of this policy	Sets out GSA's commitments to documenting and publishing information regarding material in its archives and collections.
Date of approval	May 2026
Approving body	Academic Council
Supersedes	Documentation Policy, Dec 2021
Date of EIA	April 2026
Date of next review	May 2029
Author	Michelle Kaye, Collections Lead
Responsible Executive Group area	Vice-Principal and Deputy Director (Research & Innovation)
Related policies and documents	Collections Care and Conservation Policy
Benchmarking	Arts Council England's Accreditation Scheme for Museums

Our mission is to actively safeguard, develop, document and preserve the institutional records of The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) and the artefacts and archives of staff, students, businesses and individuals associated with the School which are held in our care.

We do this to make the collection accessible in order to support scholarship and research, inspire creativity, and to surface hidden narratives contained within the School's history which are of relevance to contemporary academic and civic audiences.

The Glasgow School of Art is widely recognised for being an open and accessible institution that shares its expertise, knowledge, heritage and resources with local, national and international partners. The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) has a duty of care for the art, design, architectural and archive collections, including born digital, held in its possession and it understands that the responsible management, care and documentation of its collections and archives is of the utmost importance and central to its reputation.

Well-managed documentation procedures are an essential element of a successful, professionally run museum and archive and are indicative of how an institution views its broader responsibilities. Therefore, GSA is committed to making sure that it is able to:

- account for each item's acceptance into the collection and provide written/ signed evidence for all acquisitions. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that some historical material in the collection lacks provenance and so GSA will make efforts to identify and rectify this where possible
- record, document and label each object to the minimum standards set out in SPECTRUM, the UK's documentation standard or the equivalent for archival collections
- disseminate appropriate levels of documentation (via searchable databases or other methods, including digitized materials such as digital surrogates of museum objects and some key or particularly visual archive collections) as a means of extending public access to item/collection information

- ensure online resources meet [The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) Accessibility Regulations](#)¹
- capture and clearly convey relevant and accurate information to all stakeholders in accessible language, offering information in alternative formats as required
- provide warning and contextual information in relation to records which contain language or imagery which may be harmful
- locate each item at any given time and be in a position to track the temporary movement of any item within the museum and archive
- ensure appropriate insurance valuations are recorded for relevant material and regularly communicated to GSA's insurers
- produce and retain relevant documentation supporting the loan of all items *into* and *out of* the museum and archive for the purposes of exhibition display, conservation needs etc.
- provide written evidence that items permanently exiting the collection meet acceptable standards, as outlined in SPECTRUM, particularly with regards to de-accessioning, where the Museum Association's [Code of Ethics](#) should also be consulted.

A review of documentation processes and progress is undertaken on an annual basis and informs forward planning. Documentation programming is undertaken in consideration of collection needs, user demands and equality impact.

The GSA also recognises that it has a duty of care to guarantee the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records for its museum and archive collections. It will therefore ensure that:

- where appropriate, original cataloguing systems (such as file

¹ See Accessibility Statement at <https://gsaarchives.net/accessibility/>

cards) are retained as historical evidence of how collections documentation has developed

- current paper documentation (accessions paperwork, loan and exit forms) are archived in a secure environment but that these can be readily accessed, as and when required
- accessions paperwork is scanned and a digital surrogate is kept and backed up on a server
- consideration is given to the over reliance of collections documentation held on electronic systems where there is a risk that technology/software programmes become obsolete and the data is subsequently inaccessible
- a disaster recovery plan is in place for collections databases and a digital asset register is maintained to document born-digital materials and any potential risks
- quarterly spot checks are performed to scrutinize and maintain accuracy of locations documentation