

Library Services and Special Collections

Collections Management Policy

Special Collections

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1. Purpose

This policy outlines the collections management practices of London Metropolitan University's Special Collections Department, and serves as a framework to guide staff, researchers, depositors, and members of the public in understanding our operations and legal compliance.

It ensures the effective acquisition, preservation, and accessibility of Special Collections in alignment with the University's goal to:

- be a transformative institution that provides excellent educational and knowledge transfer services
- actively engages with real-world issues
- empower individuals to reach their full potential while contributing to London's success as a global city
- prioritise making Higher Education accessible to all, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds

2. Mission Statement

The mission of the London Metropolitan University Special Collections Department (which includes, among others, the University Archive), is to collect, organise,

preserve, and make accessible the permanent records of the University as well as rare and unique collections that support the University's teaching and research.

3. Scope

The **University Archive** is housed within Special Collections and documents the institutional history of London Metropolitan University from the founding of its earliest predecessor in 1848, to the present day. This collection reflects the activities, academic work, and research of students and staff across the University's current structure, as well as its many predecessor institutions.

Together with the University Archive, we hold the following associated collections:

- **Trades Union Congress (TUC) Library Collections**
- **The Archive of the Irish in Britain**
- **Frederick Parker Archives**
- **E&A Wates**
- **Artists' Books**

These collections are complemented by our library of rare books and periodicals, as well as smaller archival collections. They each support research, teaching, and public enquiry across subject areas such as the history of trade unions and collective bargaining, social history, Irish migration and settlement in Britain, the arts, and furniture and design.

The collections include a wide range of documents, ephemera, photographs, and oral histories which hold lasting historical, legal, financial, or administrative value.

4. Collections Development

4.1 Acquisitions

The **University Archive**, together with our library of rare books and periodicals, has largely been developed through internal transfers from within London Metropolitan University and its predecessor institutions. This method of acquisition for the University Archive remains ongoing and is conducted in collaboration with school offices, academic staff, the Students' Union, and professional departments, ensuring

the continued documentation of the University's history.

Business records of the University are held in accordance with the University's Records Retention Schedule that complies, where appropriate, with current information legislation and the requirements of course validation bodies, such as the Law Society and the Health Care Professions Council.

The **Trades Union Congress (TUC) Library Collections** and the **Frederick Parker Archive** are deposited collections. The TUC Library is periodically supplemented through transfers to Special Collections, including Annual Congress Reports and Union publications.

The **Archive of the Irish in Britain** and the **E&A Wates** collection are both owned by Library Services and Special Collections and are primarily enhanced through gifted or deposited material from individuals and organisations.

The **Artists' Books** Collection has been developed through the purchase of new material to support specific teaching requirements, while our library of rare books and periodicals comprises a blend of donated and purchased items. This collection is made available to provide broader context and an introduction to the subject areas outlined in our collections scope.

4.2 Appraisal

New acquisitions offered to Special Collections will be appraised by a qualified Archivist or Librarian on the team, in consultation with the University Librarian, and where appropriate, with Academic Liaison Librarians, relevant stakeholders, or community partners.

Appraisal decisions will be guided by the criteria outlined below:

- the materials positively enhance and develop our collections scope, academic research and student teaching and learning
- the records are of unique historical or informational value
- there are no legal ownership or rights issues that would prevent indefinite access
- the format/media type is one we are able to process, provide access and preserve

- the physical condition is stable and does not present unreasonable resource implications (e.g. storage)
- they comply with legal and ethical standards

During the appraisal process, research will be undertaken to avoid duplication and to ensure that material is not already held elsewhere or would be more appropriately housed in another repository.

Special Collections will prioritise materials that widen representation within our archives and library collections, in alignment with the University's commitment to [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#).

4.3. Deaccessioning

Material may be considered for deaccession only under the following circumstances:

- that it falls outside the defined collecting scope
- where duplicate items are already held
- where it presents significant preservation risks
- that it offers no discernible historical or informational value

All disposals will follow legal and ethical guidelines and may involve return to depositor, destruction, or transfer to a more appropriate repository.

5. Collections Information

5.1 Description Standards and Systems

Special Collections material is accessioned and catalogued using two distinct systems. Books and periodicals are catalogued via the main Library Catalogue, in collaboration with the Library's Content and Digital team. These items are catalogued according to the RDA (Resource Description & Access) standard and classified for retrieval purposes using either the Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress classification system.

For archival collections, accession information and catalogue descriptions are recorded in the online [Special Collections Catalogue](#). To ensure consistency and accuracy in how information is recorded, we follow a set of internal Cataloguing Guidelines based on established national and international standards, including:

- **ISAD(G)** – General International Standard Archival Description
- **ISAAR(CPF)** – International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families
- **Dublin Core** – for describing digital objects
- **VIAF** – Virtual International Authority File, used for controlled vocabularies and authority control

5.2 Access and Discovery

Information about our collections is shared across a range of platforms, including:

- **Online catalogues** – [Special Collections Catalogue](#) and [Library Classic Catalogue](#) and [Ebsco Discovery Service](#)
- **Digital repositories** – [London Met Repository](#) (EPrints), [JSTOR](#) and [TUC project website](#)
- **Discovery platforms** – [JISC Archives Hub](#) and [The National Archives' Discovery](#) service
- **Social media** – [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#)

Sensitive or restricted information is managed in accordance with relevant data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 and guidance from The National Archives.

Users are clearly informed of any restrictions or redactions applied to collection information, with access decisions documented and reviewed in line with institutional policy and legal requirements.

5.3 Improving Accessibility

We recognise that information made available through our catalogues should be

accessible to all users. To support this, we consult with the [Disabilities and Dyslexia Service](#) and the Marketing team, using their [Disability Accessibility](#) guidelines and adhering to relevant accessibility standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and best practice in inclusive metadata.

We are committed to using inclusive, respectful language in our descriptions and to making reasonable adjustments to improve access.

For example:

- **Handwritten documents:** We aim to transcribe handwritten text and include the transcription within the catalogue record.
- **Audiovisual material:** Where possible, we use transcription software to generate transcripts and apply Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to enable full-text search within documents.

5.4 Data Management and Review

Collections information is regularly reviewed and updated, particularly following new acquisitions, reappraisal, or conservation work. We also undertake retrospective reviews of selected collections to examine the use of language, ensuring appropriate context is provided. Where possible, we use Name and Subject Authority Files to incorporate alternative terms, to improve discoverability and reflect inclusive, respectful description practices.

Any errors or outdated information identified by users or staff will be reviewed and corrected in a timely manner.

5.5 Cataloguing Priorities

The Special Collections team prioritises cataloguing work based on a combination of data and community feedback. This includes usage statistics gathered from systems such as the catalogue, as well as feedback from stakeholders and visitors. Our approach is also guided by the needs of teaching and learning at the University, ensuring that our cataloguing efforts align with academic priorities.

We are also committed to widening representation by actively considering equity, diversity, and inclusion when selecting collections to catalogue.

6. Collections Care

6.1 Storage and Environmental Conditions

The Special Collections are housed in secure, monitored environments appropriate to their format and condition. Environmental conditions such as temperature, relative humidity, light levels are controlled and regularly recorded to meet **BS 4971:2017** standards. Items are stored in archival-quality containers (or boxes) and shelving systems.

6.2 Disaster Recovery and Emergency Preparedness

Disaster boxes, containing essential equipment and materials for use in the event of flooding or other environmental emergencies, are maintained in designated Collections Storage Areas. These kits are intended to support immediate response and mitigation efforts to protect Special Collections material.

An audit of disaster boxes is carried out periodically to ensure contents remain complete, functional, and up to date.

6.3 Handling and Use

All staff, researchers, and visitors are expected to follow the Handling Guidelines, which are available both online and in printed form within the Reading Room. For those new to using archival material or visiting the Reading Room, Special Collections staff are available to provide a brief introduction and guidance on appropriate handling.

To support the safe use of archival materials and rare books, a range of handling aids is provided as needed. These may include book supports, weights, and gloves, depending on the format and condition of the material.

In some instances, fragile or unstable items may be subject to access restrictions or made available in surrogate form, such as digital copies. Where possible, researchers will be informed of any such restrictions in advance of their visit to

minimise disruption or disappointment.

6.4 Housekeeping and Pest Management

All storage areas that contain material from Special Collections are subject to regularly supervised cleaning to reduce dust and pollutants.

Common pests found in archives include insects like silverfish, carpet beetles, and booklice, which can damage paper documents. To safeguard against these pests, an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programme is maintained, including regular inspections and documentation of findings.

All staff and visitors within collection areas are strictly prohibited from consuming food and drink.

6.5 Conservation

Priority is given to **Preventive Conservation**, which aims to create and maintain suitable environmental conditions, appropriate storage, and safe handling practices to slow deterioration and reduce the need for interventive treatment.

Materials in Special Collections are regularly assessed as part of acquisitions, cataloguing, and storage reviews. Items identified as fragile, at risk, or deteriorating are flagged for conservation assessment and prioritised according to risk, significance, and demand.

Conservation treatment is only carried out by trained professionals, and in-house treatments only include the removal of harmful adhesives or fastenings (e.g. rusty staples, pressure-sensitive tape).

To protect fragile archive material, items are rehoused in acid-free, archival-quality folders, boxes, and other enclosures to ensure ongoing protection.

6.6 Digital Preservation

A significant proportion of the Special Collections is held in analogue formats, primarily paper-based materials such as printed documents, photographs, and ephemera.

Those that are held in digital formats can be grouped into the following categories:

- **Born-digital materials:** Items originally created in digital form, such as digital photographs, word-processed documents, and spreadsheets
- **Digitised surrogates:** Digital copies of analogue originals, created through scanning or audiovisual transfer. These include images, text documents, sound recordings, and videos.
- **Metadata and descriptive records:** Information that supports discovery, management, and preservation of collections, including catalogue records, accession logs, and preservation metadata.
- **Administrative and technical documentation:** Files related to collection management processes, such as donor agreements, copyright statements, and conservation reports.

6.6.1 Standards and Best Practice

To support and guide the long-term preservation of digital assets held in Special Collections, we broadly follow the principles of the **Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model (ISO 14721)**. Our preservation approach is further informed by best practice and guidance from the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) and The National Archives (UK). These frameworks help ensure that digital materials remain authentic, accessible, and usable over time, regardless of changes in technology or format.

6.6.2 Preservation Workflow

New digital accessions are typically received by Special Collections either via physical carriers (e.g. portable hard drives) or through secure digital transfer. Files received on physical media are prioritised for transfer to secure storage and promptly processed to minimise the risk of data loss or degradation.

During processing, each file is assessed and a checksum is generated to ensure file integrity over time. Technical metadata is then captured using open-source tools such as DROID (Digital Record Object IDentification), which helps identify file formats and supports long-term preservation planning.

All metadata (descriptive, technical, and administrative) is recorded and associated with the relevant record in our Digital Archive (see Section **6.6.3 - Storage**). This ensures authenticity, supports future access, and aligns with standards such as the OAIS Reference Model.

Access copies are generated from preservation masters, and where permissions allow, made available via the [Special Collections Catalogue](#). Access is subject to copyright, GDPR, and deposit agreement conditions. Where full access is restricted, surrogate or redacted versions may be provided to support discovery and research.

6.6.3 Storage

Digital records and their associated metadata are stored in our Digital Archive, currently hosted on SharePoint. Access to this archive is securely managed, with permissions restricted to Special Collections staff and selected members of the Library team.

Selected access copies, where permitted under copyright and licensing terms, are made available through a variety of methods, including a standalone computer in the Reading Room, the [London Met Repository](#) (EPrints) repository, and relevant project or affiliated websites.

6.6.4 Access and Use

Access copies of digital records, where London Metropolitan University holds the copyright or has obtained the necessary permissions from rights holders, are made available via the [Special Collections Catalogue](#), [London Met Repository](#) (EPrints) and affiliated project websites.

Decisions about how digital records can be shared, and on which platforms they may appear are typically agreed upon during the Deposit Agreement process with individuals or depositing organisations.

Where full access is not possible, surrogate or redacted versions may be provided. And, where digital records are affected by Closure Periods (under the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) or at the request of the depositor)

6.7 Loans

Items selected for exhibition or loan are assessed for suitability based on their condition, handling risk, and environmental requirements, with final approval given by the University Librarian.

Items requested are processed using our Loan agreement, which includes detailed handling and security requirements.

6.8 Storage Review

A survey of the collections Storage Area is carried out periodically using the National Conversation Service [Benchmarks 3.0](#) framework to:

- give an indication of which improvements in conservation might be needed
- provide a practical framework for measuring progress, and creating forward plans
- provide a framework for managing risk to our collection

6.9 Environmental Sustainability

Special Collections is committed to reducing the environmental impact of its work, in accordance with the University's Carbon and Environmental Management Plan (part of London Metropolitan University's [Estates Strategy 2022-31](#)).

This commitment is reflected in key areas such as digital preservation and the implementation of sustainable practices in environmental storage and packaging.

7. Collections Access

7.1 Users

London Metropolitan University's Special Collections are available to a wide range of users in support of learning, teaching, research, and community engagement.

Access is granted to:

Internal Users: Current students, academic and professional staff, and alumni of London Metropolitan University.

External Users: Independent researchers, SCONUL Access members, visiting scholars, depositors, community partners, and members of the general public with a research interest.

7.2 Access Provision

7.2.1 Onsite Access

The Special Collections Reading Room, located at the Holloway Road Learning Centre, is open to all users during our advertised opening times. Internal users may drop into the Reading Room, however, advance notice via email is encouraged if archive material is required. External visitors must book in advance via email. A simple registration process is required before accessing materials.

The Special Collections team will respond to all enquiries received from the public by letter, or email, within 10 working days of receipt.

7.2.2 Remote Access

Online appointments available for researchers and students, who can book a one-hour timeslot to view Special Collections material remotely. Consultation via email prior to booking your appointment is requested.

A Scan on Demand service is also available on request.

7.2.3 Digital Access

Digital copies of both paper-based and born-digital materials are available for viewing on a standalone PC in our Reading Room. Selected digital content can also be accessed through our [Special Collections Catalogue](#) and related project websites. Please note that access to materials is subject to Copyright and the General Data Protection Regulation (2018).

7.2.4 Conditions of Access

Access is subject to the availability of staff and any restrictions related to the specific collection requested. Any planned closures will be advertised on the Library Services and Special Collections [LibGuides](#) page in advance, or if unexpected via our Social

Media.

Users must comply with all Handling Guidelines provided by Special Collections staff and be aware that no food and drink is permitted in the Reading Room.

7.3 Access Information

All essential information for visitors is available on our [LibGuides](#) page, which includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Opening Hours
- Registration procedure
- Scan on Demand service
- Online Appointments
- Guidelines and Rules for Use
- Reproduction of Images
- Contact Information
- Links to Online Finding Aids and Related Project Websites

Printed copies of key guidance documents are also accessible within the Reading Room, including Rules and Regulations, Copyright Information, Handling Guidelines, Self-Service Photography Policy and information on Image Licensing.

Our current opening hours and general institutional details are also published on The National Archives and Archives Hub websites to ensure broad accessibility and transparency.

The Reading Room is wheelchair accessible, and full information about wheelchair access and how we support users with a disability can be found on our [Library pages](#).

7.4 Outreach and Engagement

The Reading Room is available for use by students and teaching staff for group workshops involving Special Collections materials, like archives. These sessions are designed to enhance students' research skills through engagement with primary sources, and enhance critical thinking, and information literacy.

The Special Collections team also collaborate with Academic Schools and the

Outreach and Widening Participation Team at London Metropolitan University to deliver object-based workshops for schools and students. These initiatives support the University's Access and Participation Plan.

For more information or to book a session, please visit our [LibGuides](#) page.

7.5 Promotion

Special Collections promotes its services primarily through two social media platforms: [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#). These channels allow us to share news, highlight upcoming events, and showcase our collections to both internal and external audiences. Additionally, they provide a space to feature community and University-related news and initiatives.

Information about news and events is also shared on the following ways:

- Internal Communications Newsletters (On Campus and MetConnect)
- Display and Exhibitions
- Printed posters
- Public events (online and in-person)
- Participation in external events and conferences

7.6 Loans

Material in Special Collections is available for request to use in displays and exhibitions at external institutions (see **6.7 Loans**) for more information about requirements.

Selected books and periodicals held in Special Collections are available for Inter-Library Loan on request. However, restrictions do apply in relation to the condition and number of copies available.

8. Legal and Ethical Compliance

8.1 Enquiries

All Freedom of Information (FoI) and Data Protection enquiries at London Metropolitan University are handled by our [Information Compliance Manager](#)

8.2 Safeguarding Personal Data

In compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018), the Special Collections team:

- ensures that personal data collected through the processes of Accessions and Deposits is securely managed and stored, and is not made publicly available.
- maintains personal data collected during the Registration process on our secure user platform, Target Connect.
- retains personal data in accordance with the University's Records Management Retention Schedule.
- assesses any personal data found within collection materials and designates its access status on the [Special Collections Catalogue](#) as either 'Open' or 'Closed'. Sensitivity reviews are carried out to prevent breaches involving Special Category Data, as defined by GDPR.
- stores Closed records in a clearly labelled folder ('Closed') within each box. These records are removed before the box is issued to readers. All Closed records are periodically reviewed, and their status may be updated following the conclusion of their Closure period.
- follows [guidance](#) from The National Archives

9. Audit and Risk Assessment

Risk management at the University is coordinated by the University Secretary in accordance with the [Risk Management Policy](#), which is approved by the University's Board of Governors.

The University maintains a Corporate Risk Register, alongside Local Risk Registers for Professional Service Departments (PSDs) and Schools, including Library Services and Special Collections.

Special Collections utilises the departmental Local Risk Register to manage and mitigate risks related to Disaster Recovery, Staffing, Finance, and Operational

Services.